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**THE BOY SCOUT.**

By N. S. WOOD (The Young American Actor).



Lew's attention was suddenly attracted by some sound in the thicket. He sprang to the bank, seized and cocked his rifle, and peered into the bushes.

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# THE BOY SCOUT.

By N. S. WOOD, (The Young American Actor),

Author of "The Property Boy; or, Before the Footlights and Behind the Scenes," "The Boy Star; or, From the Footlights to Fortune," etc., etc.

## CHAPTER I.

THE SETTLER'S CABIN—AN UNWELCOME GUEST  
—A STORM BREWING.

"Now, then, Mary, child, help me get supper; it is growing late, and if Lew returns he will want something to eat."

"Do you think he will be at home to-night, mother?"

"It is very likely, for he has been away for three days, and he never stays longer."

A handsome, middle-aged woman and a girl of eighteen were the speakers, the place being a rough but comfortable frame house on the outskirts of a mining camp in California.

The house was built of great logs placed together, and the chinks filled with plaster, and contained three rooms on the lower floor, besides an ell room used as a pantry, and two on the floor above, but within everything was as cozy and bright as one could wish, an air of comfort pervading it which would not have been expected from the rough exterior.

There was a great fire-place at one side, where a huge log, resting on bright fire-dogs, snapped and cracked and gave forth a cheerful heat, as well as light, while above, on a broad stone shelf, were the few simple ornaments which betokened the presence of women, and added color to the picture.

In a corner stood a dresser where the dishes were arranged in rows on the shelves, a vase filled with wild flowers standing on the ledge, and a bright shawl thrown carelessly over one corner.

A tall, solemn looking clock ticked monotonously in an angle formed by two of the walls, and opposite was a short flight of steps leading to a door, and thence again to the floor above.

A neat rag carpet occupied the center of the floor and on it stood a plain deal table which Mary now proceeded to set for supper.

Colonel Valleo, the owner of the place, had settled in California during the early days of the gold excitement, and owned a considerable tract of rich land on the side of a canyon which he had acquired by Spanish grant, but, although rich in land, he was sometimes at considerable trouble to obtain ready money when he needed it.

Their cows and hens furnished them with milk and eggs and in the garden back of the house they could raise vegetables, while the rifle of young Lew, Mrs. Valleo's son, often procured them dainties from the mountains or woods.

Ready money was sometimes hard to obtain, however, although Colonel Valleo hoped to overcome his trouble by the sale of a part of his land, the mining camp near them promising to develop into a town some day when men would flock hither from all parts and a flourishing settlement grow around them.

As Mary spread a clean white cloth upon the table, there was heard the distant roll of thunder echoing and re-echoing among the hills.

"I wish Lew would come," muttered Mrs. Valleo, who had just come in from the kitchen. "I fear that we will have a storm, and besides—"

"What is the matter, mother?" asked the young girl, as she noticed a look of anxiety on the elder woman's face.

"Nothing, child, nothing," said Mrs. Valleo, placing a dish on the table. "Storms among the mountains are not pleasant things to be caught out in, as you know."

"Yes, but you said 'besides,' and then stopped. You were thinking of something more to be dreaded than storms. What was it, mother?"

"Nothing, nothing, it was only a fancy," returned Mrs. Valleo, half petulantly. "I really don't know what I was thinking about."

At that moment the sound of distant thunder was again heard, louder than before and at the same moment a hoarse voice cried outside:

"Halloo there, the house! Are you all asleep or dead?"

"That voice!" gasped Mrs. Valleo, on her way to the kitchen.

Mary did not hear the exclamation, for in her sudden fright she had dropped a plate, which fell to the floor with a clatter and broke in pieces.

"Don't be so careless, child," said Mrs. Valleo, recovering her own composure. "Go and see who is outside."

At that moment a man, past middle age, with long, silvery, gray hair and beard, entered the living room from one of the bedrooms, and said:

"Get a light, Mary, and stir up the fire. Lew has come home."

"No, father, it is not Lew," said the girl, lighting a candle and placing it on the table, the room having grown suddenly dark.

There came a loud knock at the door leading outside, answered by the barking of a dog.

"Come in!" called Colonel Valleo, and two men entered.

One was a stout, middle-aged man, dressed in half miner, half farmer garb, with a broad red face and grizzled beard, while the other was dressed with more pretension, and had a smooth face, not a common thing among the men of California in the early sixties.

Mary Valleo's gaze seemed riveted upon the stranger's face, for the other man she knew, and she felt a strange thrill such as she had never experienced before.

Mrs. Valleo turned pale for an instant, but she bent quickly over the fire, raking up the embers and causing a more ruddy glow to shoot forth.

"Good-evenin', cunnel," said the big man. "I was passin' an' come in. This is a friend o' mine what's come here on business."

"Good-evening, Mr. Otten—good-evening, stranger!" said the colonel, cordially. "Sit down, gentlemen. Supper will be ready in a few minutes. Mother, put on extra plates for Mr. Otten and Mr.—Mr.—I beg pardon?"

"Black is my name," said the stranger— "Benjamin Black. I come from the northern part of the State. I fancy I have seen your wife before, Colonel Valleo—in the East, maybe."

"Never," said Mrs. Valleo, quietly, as she left the fire and crossed to the dresser.

"No?" said Ben Black carelessly. "I had an idea we had met, but it's of no consequence."

"Cunnel," said Mr. Otten, "I come to see you on a leetle matter of business. Mr. Black here holds a note of mine for three hundred dollars, but he's willin' to gimme a extension o' time if I can give him a good indorser, so if you'll just put your name to that—"

"Father! Colonel Valleo, you will not do this!" cried Mrs. Valleo, suddenly coming forward. "You will not break the rule you have always kept to?"

Otten looked chagrined, but Ben Black's face grew dark and an angry light came into his eyes.

"I have made it a rule never to indorse any one's notes," said the colonel. "I am very sorry, neighbor Otten, but—"

"Wall, mebby you can lend me the money, cunnel? That'll do just as well and I can take up the note and let Mr. Black go?"

"I am very sorry, Mr. Otten, but I really have not as much as three hundred dollars in the house at present. Ready money is a scarce article."

"I shall have it myself in ten days," muttered Otten, "but Mr. Black has business up in Yreka; he's sheriff there, and can't stop. The note's due now, and over, but he'll gimme an extension if I give him a good man's name on the back of it. Otherways I'll be sold up and lose all I got."

"Colonel, remember your promise," said Mrs. Valleo, as her husband seemed about to waver.

"I don't know what you got against me, Mrs. Valleo," muttered Otten. "I ain't goin' ter run away an' ruin the cunnel, and he's wuth a heap sight more'n three hundred dollars. I'm wuth it myself, but just now I'm broke, and as it's on'y to oblige a friend, I don't see—"

"I do not distrust you in the least, Mr. Otten," said Mrs. Valleo, with a glance of defiance at the stranger. "Gentlemen, will you draw up your chairs? Mary, child, bring in the supper."

"Then you do distrust me, madame?" asked Ben Black with a laugh and an angry look.

"I have nothing to say," said the settler's wife, "beyond disapproving of my husband's putting his name to any paper which you have to do with."

"Why, mother, that is not courteous, not hospitable," said the colonel, rising. "You must apologize to our guest."

"That I will never do," said the woman.

Mary at this moment put a steaming dish of meat and some baked potatoes on the table and then stood looking fixedly at the stranger, who had scarcely more than glanced at her since his arrival.

"You will not!" muttered the colonel. "You must, I command you."

"I will never apologize to that man for what I have said," returned Mrs. Valleo. "I did not ask him here, and I never wish to see his face again."

"Awakens old memories and unpleasant ones, doesn't it, Mrs. Valleo?" asked the other with a coarse laugh. "I told you that your

wife and I had met before, colonel, but perhaps it is as well to say nothing about that. She never told you much about her past life, did she?"

Mrs. Valleo looked pale, yet defiant, the colonel seemed distracted, and Ben Black wore an air of triumph.

Before the colonel could answer, or another word be said, there was a loud hallo from outside, and a step was heard at the door.

"That's Lew!" cried Mary. "Oh, I'm so glad he has come at last!"

## CHAPTER II.

### LEW AND HIS FRIEND—THE STORM BREAKS.

THE door was thrown open as by a gust of wind, and a tall, handsome young fellow with clustering curls reaching to his shoulders, a broad sombrero on the back of his head, and a rifle in his hand, burst into the room.

He wore a blue woolen hunting shirt, dark trousers, a broad leather belt, and boots which reached to his knee, and over his shoulder was slung a plump game bag.

"How are you, Mary? How do, mother? Good-evening, father. Good-evening, stranger!" he cried, glancing around the room. "Why, sis, I've only been gone three days, and yet you're looking prettier than ever. Give me a kiss."

"I am so glad you have returned, Lew," said Mrs. Valleo. "I feared that something had happened. Sit down and have supper. You must be famished."

"Famished!" laughed the young fellow, putting his rifle in a corner and hanging his hat on a peg. "I don't know what that is exactly, but I'm as hungry as a b'ar or an owl."

"This is Mr. Black, Lew," said the colonel, as they all drew up to the table, the threatened trouble having been banished by the boy's sudden arrival.

"Good-evening, stranger," said Lew, casting a quick glance at Ben Black's face, and finding little to please him therein.

Intuitively he distrusted and disliked the man, but until he knew more about him would say nothing.

"Likely boy that of yours, colonel," said Ben Black, as the supper began. "He is yours, I s'pose! Looks more like the mother, though."

"He is Mrs. Valleo's child by her first marriage," answered the colonel. "Mary is my child."

"Yes, yes, and a girl to be proud of. I suppose there's no doubt about his being—"

That Ben Black was about to say something to awaken unpleasant memories was evident by the set expression on Mrs. Valleo's face, but at that moment a loud hail was heard from without.

"B'ars and catamounts, if I didn't plumb forget the Irishman!" cried Lew, jumping up. "Wait a moment."

Throwing the door open and revealing the black and threatening night, Lew called out:

"Halloo!"

"Halloo, versilf!" came the answer in a rich brogue. "Where are yez? Sure, I'm kilt entirely from nearly fallin' down the cannon."

"This way, Dan," and Lew seized a candle from the ledge over the fire-place and held it above his head.

"It's a wild Irishman I met down at t'other end o' the canyon," explained the boy. "He's had a tough time of it, lost nearly all he had, and it's a wonder the Injuns left him anything."

"Indians!" gasped Mrs. Valleo.

"Yes; there was three or four of 'em about to do fur him, but I popped my rifle to my shoulder, knocked one of 'em over and the rest skinned out."

"Indians," mused Colonel Valleo. "I did not know that any were about."

"Heard tell down to the fort that they was goin' on the war path," said Lew, "but them four are all I see."

"Halloo!" came from the darkness.

"Halloo you, Irish. Can't you find your way?"

"Begob, I couldn't, if ye hadn't showed the light," was the answer.

At the next moment a tall, good-natured looking Irishman with a very red face and redder head, came in.

He wore a long coat of frieze, which reached nearly to his heels, stout boots, rough trousers, a flowered waistcoat, and a broad brimmed hat, beneath which his ruddy face, beaming with good nature, shone like a fire at the mouth of a cave.

"Good-avenin' all," he said. "It's glad I am

to see frinds wanst more, for sorry's the day that I ever crossed the say, and sorrier whin I come to Californy, and faix it's Dan Rafferty himself that would go back the day if he wor in sight of a ship."

"You have been unfortunate?" asked Colonel Valleo.

"Begorrah, I've had nothin' but bad luck from the time I left ould Ireland," muttered Dan, seating himself on a stool. "I had two hundred pounds left me be an uncle, and they tould me that America was the place to double it."

"Yes! And so you came here?"

"I did, worse luck, me and me wife and me son, Danny, the only wan left out of siven as foine boys and girruls as ye'd see in a day's walk."

"Well, comin' over an the ship me wife took sick and died, and they buried her in the wather, where I never thought to put anny wan belonging to me."

"Then when I got to New York they tould me to go to Californy; and that's where I'd make money hand over fist, and so I bought a wagon and two oxes and started."

"Me luck got worse and worse the farther I wint, and at last me poor little Danny died, and I buried him in the woods, thinking it the saddest day that ever shone on me."

"Here I am now, me money all gone, me oxen dead, me wagon broken and me goods stolen away be them haythins av Injines, and troth I wish I wor dead mesilf this minute."

"Don't get down hearted, stranger," said Ben Black. "You may be down on your luck now, but you'll be up again. Shake hands."

The Irishman looked up, gave Ben Black a searching glance, thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his long coat, and said:

"Ivery dog shakes his own paw, me man, and let you shake yours, and shake yersilf out of my company, for I don't like the looks of ye."

Lew smiled, Otten laughed, and Ben Black said contemptuously:

"Do you know why the Indians did not burn you at the stake when they had you?"

"I do not, faith."

"Cause you're too green to burn, that's why," laughed the other. "Bah! you ain't worth powder, you ain't."

"Maybe not, me man," said Dan, "and talkin' about Injines, you'd be safe among them, and do ye know for why?"

Ben Black merely gave a scornful look at the Irishman, who went on:

"Because ye're not born to be burned in this world, that's why, and ye're meant for the rope, not the fire, me man. Maybe I'm not so green as I look."

"Oh, you go to the devil!" growled Ben Black.

"Come, come, Dan, never mind him, but have some supper," said Lew. "Don't be discouraged, old pard. You may strike it rich yet."

While Mary and Mrs. Valleo were setting something hot before Dan and Lew, the colonel, Mr. Otten and Ben Black went into another room unobserved.

"Mother," said Mary presently, looking around, "the stranger has gone."

"I shall be glad never to see him again," said Mrs. Valleo. "I do not like his looks, and I fear him."

"He said he knew you," continued Mary.

"He is mistaken," said the other coldly.

"Who is this man, mother?" asked Lew, looking up. "I do not like his looks, he has an evil face. Where does he come from and what does he want?"

"He means mischief," murmured Mrs. Valleo, and at that moment the door of the inner room opened.

"Very well, you will find it satisfactory, I hope, Mr. Black," said the colonel, coming out.

Ben Black had a strip of paper in his hands, which he now folded and put in his pocket.

"Much obligeed, cunnel," said Otten, "and as fur as the money goes you needn't be frightened, for I'll have more'n enough to settle with Mr. Black long afore the note comes due."

"Husband! what have you done?" cried Mrs. Valleo, hurrying forward. "You have not indorsed that note?"

"Women don't understand anything about business," retorted Colonel Valleo shortly.

"You have broken your promise," wailed the poor woman. "I tell you that that man means to ruin you. Why have you not kept your word? You promised me that you would never sign your name to anyone's notes."

"Has Mrs. Valleo always kept her word?"

Ben Black laughed.

Lew was upon his feet in an instant and with flashing eyes and clenched fists cried angrily:

"How dare you speak like that to my mother, you hound? Take back your words this moment, or I'll brain you."

"I've nothing to say to you, brat!" returned Ben Black. "Your mother owes me an apology and I will not go till she gives it to me."

"Owes you an apology!" cried Lew. "Why, you are not fit to breathe the same air with her, you dog."

"Ha, ha, you do well to defend her," laughed the other scornfully, "but you would not if you knew all that I know. It will be a good thing for Colonel Valleo were he to turn her from his door."

Lew grasped the hilt of his hunting-knife, but Mary held him back.

"Leave this house!" he thundered.

"Not for you, my young sprig!" returned Ben Black. "Colonel Valleo, do you allow your guests to be thus insulted?"

"Insulted!" hissed Lew.

"Silence, boy!" cried the colonel. "Madam, you have lied to me!" turning upon his wife. "You told we that your husband was dead when you came here that stormy night twelve years ago."

"As God is my judge, I told the truth!" cried the poor woman.

"It was a lie! You had no husband, and your son is—"

"Silence! You shall not speak!" cried Lew. "My mother is an angel and I will not hear a word said against her, Colonel Valleo."

The colonel seemed like a man beside himself.

"Who are you that defiles me?" he roared. "You have not even a name. Go! This house is no longer your home!"

"My God! Speak, mother," moaned the boy. "Am I your son?"

"Yes, and your father was a good man and my husband, I swear it!"

"Go!" thundered Colonel Valleo, in a rage.

Lew picked up his hat and rifle, and strode to the door, as a gust of wind more violent than any that had yet been felt, dashed it wide open, extinguishing the lights.

The storm had at this moment broken in full fury.

As the boy stood in the open doorway a blinding flash of lightning illumined the heavens, throwing his form into bold relief.

"Do you see that flash?" he cried. "It shall give me a name till God in his justice gives me one that I can be proud of. The name of Valleo I renounce! Henceforth I am Lightning Lew!"

In another moment he was gone.

## CHAPTER III.

### IN THE WOODS—THE CAVE—DAN'S FRIGHT—LEW'S RESOLVE.

"HALLO! hallo!"

"Hallo!"

"Hould an, don't run so fast."

"Is that you, Dan?"

"Sure it's no one else, but it wud be nobody, if I had to run much further. I'm nearly dead."

"Come on; there's a shelter not far from here where we can be secure from the storm."

"Faith, it's a strange bye ye air entirely, Lew, to be showin' me a shelter. How do I know ye won't rin away from it like ye did the cabin bevant?"

"No, Dan; the place I am taking you to belongs all to me, and no one can turn me out."

"Troth, I'm sorry now ye didn't ram the lies down Mr. Ben Black's dirthy troat. I didn't like him the minyute I set eyes on him, and I like him still less now that I don't see him."

"Never mind him, Dan, but follow me. We are not far away now."

"Begob, ye must have the eyes of a cat to see anything in this darkness. I'd have fallen down the cannon a dozen times but for ye. Do they often shoot it off?"

"Shoot what off?"

"The cannon. Ye tould me ye met me in wan, but I saw nothing but a gully."

"Oh, come on, Irish," laughed the boy.

"You're too green for me."

"Faix, if green means wet, it's thure enough for ye, for I'm that soaked wid the rain that I wouldn't burrun if I wor in the midst av flames."

When Lightning Lew had rushed from the house of Colonel Valleo, Dan had followed in hot haste, having no desire to remain where the boy was not welcome.

Having at last overtaken his young friend,

the emigrant declared that he would never leave him, and swore to assist him to the extent of his power.

The storm was still raging, the rain pouring down, the lightning flashing, the thunder roaring, the wind sweeping furiously down the passes, but, unheeding all this, the boy pushed on as though a part of the tempest himself.

"This way," he cried, suddenly, taking the Irishman's hand and leading the way through the blackest darkness.

"Begorra, I can't see me hand in front av me," muttered Dan. "Phwere are we goin' anyhow? Is it the bottomless pit ye're takin' me to, I don't know?"

"Sh!" said the boy, suddenly pausing and releasing Dan's hand.

A hoarse growl was heard, and poor Dan trembled as he beheld two globes of fire shining from out the darkness directly in front of him.

Suddenly he heard a deafening report, and it seemed as though he would be overwhelmed, there was such a commotion.

"Oh, murdher! Phwhat has happened in-toire?" he gasped. "If ye're kilt say so and I'll get out."

"No, I'm not dead, Dan," laughed Lew, lightly, but I reckon the b'ar or the coyote is. Wait till I strike a light."

"Strike a light is it, and all this rain pourin' down? It's daft ye are."

"Rain? There isn't any rain here, Dan. We're at home now."

There was a click, a sudden flash of light and then the Irishman saw the boy standing before him with a bunch of blazing tow in his hand.

"Oh, murdher, the bye is on fire! Well, well, I never thought ye wor the devil or wan of his imps."

Lew blew upon the tow till it was alight and they dropped it upon a mass of dried leaves in one corner of what Dan now perceived to be a cavern, and presently a cheerful fire was blazing away, wood being added by the young hunter.

"Thar, we're as snug as a bug in a rug, Irish," laughed Lew, placing his rifle against the wall, "and now let's have a look at the b'ar, for that's what it is, sartin."

"Oh, murdher! an'did ye kill that big baste wid one crack av that little pop gun of yours?" cried Dan, gazing in surprise at the body of a big black bear that lay on the floor of the cavern.

"Right you are, stranger, and that's what he gets fur comin' to my house. Reckon the storm drove him in here, and gave me a supper besides."

"Well, well, there's hospitality for ye," sighed Dan, as he seated himself on a boulder, "but thin, I suppose ye have more right to the place forbye that big brute, and if ye hadn't killed him, he might have done the same for ye. And this is phwhat ye call yer home, is it? Well, it's comfortable if it's not commojous, as Micky Burns said when they put him in his grave."

"It's all my own, Dan, and no one can drive me out, not even the b'ars," said Lew, "and now I reckon I'll get some sleep, for I'm plumb tired out."

"Sleep, is it?" muttered Dan, as Lew stretched himself out upon the hard floor with a stone for a pillow. "Begorry, I couldn't sleep here if I wor dead. How do ye know that some wild baste or caterwaulin' Injine won't be walkin' in on ye before mornin'?"

"Oh, no they won't, Irish. I've shut the door, and they can't get in."

"Shut the dure, is it? Oh, worra! the bye is clean gone off his head! Sure there's niver a dure here, at all."

Lew laughed heartily, and then said:

"There's a rock rolled up agin the openin', stranger, that no ten men can roll away from outside, but a babby can push it back in here. I discovered the place by chance, and it's been a handy hidin' place for me the last three years when I've been out huntin' and the storm overtook me."

"Faix, it's a wonderful bye ye are entirely, and I think I'll go to slape mesilf. Where is me bed?"

"Same as mine, Dan, on the floor," laughed Lew. "Don't need no shakin' up nor airin', and never creaks."

"No, begorry, but my bones will creak, I'm thinkin', be lyin' on the hard stones like that. If I had a few pebbles to roll under me it might be asier."

However, a lot of leaves with his big coat laid on top made as comfortable a bed as he desired, and Dan was soon sound asleep and snoring, the fire casting a glow over his ruddy face. Good natured even in sleep, while without the

storm howled and raved, and even the wild beasts sought shelter.

Dan awoke to find the fire out and the sun shining in at the entrance of the cavern, but, upon looking around he could see nothing of his boy friend.

"I wondher phwat's took him away?" he muttered, getting up. "Faix it's not such a bad bed I've had after all, barrin' that I'm a bit stiff in me legs. Hallo, Lew! phwere are ye at all?"

There was no answer, and Dan, following the light, walked to the entrance and then outside, finding himself in a ravine, the sun glancing down through rifts in the trees upon the soft grass at his feet.

The storm had ceased and all was bright and beautiful, an air of calm peacefulness resting upon the scene in strong contrast to the storm and tumult of a few hours previous.

"Where has he got to anyhow?" muttered Dan, taking a few steps and looking about him.

There was a sudden growl, almost at his feet, it seemed, and then he saw a big, black bear rushing straight at him.

"Oh, murther! I'll be kilt, so I will!" he cried, with a yell of terror, as he took to his heels, never heeding which way he went.

The was another roar, and, casting a hurried glance over his shoulder, the poor fellow saw that the bear was gaining upon him, and that, instead of retreating to the cave, he had taken the opposite direction and was in the open air.

"Oh, glory! is there no three I can climb up? It's kilt and eaten I'll be before the bye comes to me rescue."

There was a small tree not far away, and toward this Dan now ran with all his speed.

He reached it, and in a moment was scrambling up it, a short limb projecting from the trunk ten feet from the ground, offering him a resting place.

Reaching this and looking down he beheld a strange transformation.

Standing upon its hind legs, the bear suddenly threw back its head and then dropped its skin on the ground, and the laughing face of Lightning Lew was revealed.

"Got yer that time, Irish," chuckled the boy. "Thought I was a b'ar, didn't yer? That's one on you!"

"Oh, glory! phwat a turn ye gav' me!" laughed Dan, his ruddy face fairly shining. "Faix, it's a rare joker ye air, me bye, but yer give me a scare for wan while that I didn't know if I wor alive or dead."

"Come down, Dan," laughed Lew, "and we'll have breakfast. I've been up, skinned and dressed the b'ar, made a fire, roasted a big hunk o' meat and had everything ready these two hours."

"Sure, and what o'clock is it then? Yer must have got up in the middle of the night."

"No, I didn't; I got out at sunrise, and it's now 'bout the middle o' the forenoon."

"I'll see av yez air correct, me buck," said Dan, taking a big silver watch from his waist-coat pocket. "I have me own timepiece wid me, brought over from Ireland, and now I'll see if ye can tell the time or not. Oh glory, so ye can! It's half after ten, so it is. Is it a witch ye are?"

"Oh, boys that live in the woods an' mountains don't have no need o' clocks," answered Lew. "They have God's clocks, the sun and stars, the moon, the birds and flowers, all nature, if they'll only study it."

"Begorry, bye, ye're a jool, and whin I'm wid ye I need niver be late to dinner, for ye can tell the time to a minute. What are yer goin' to do whin ye leave here?"

"Go down to the fort and offer my services as a scout. I know this whole country like a book, and if you want a good guide or hunter, call on Lightning Lew."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### BEN BLACK'S SCHEMES.

THE morning was bright and beautiful, and no trace of the storm of the previous night could be seen around the settler's dwelling.

Mary Valleo, in a soft clinging dress, a sunbonnet pushed back from her forehead, and a light switch in her hand, passed down the little lane driving the cows to pasture.

The patient animals moved slowly along, pausing now and then to crop the tender, dew-sprinkled grass, prancing when the girl caught up to them and stopping again when she fell behind.

Reaching the fence she took down the bars and then, as the cows passed on into the past-

ure lot, stood leaning against the moss-grown post gazing absently toward the woods.

The snapping of a twig, followed by a low whistle, caused the girl to look up, and she saw Ben Black approaching.

"You are prompt," he said, with a half sneer. "I expected you, but not so soon."

"Oh, Mr. Black," said Mary, with a sigh, "dreadful things have happened since last night."

"Has your half brother returned?" asked Black, while a shade of disappointment flitted across his face.

"No. I wish he had. Father is terribly angry with mother and will not speak to her. What have you done? It was you who brought about this quarrel. Why did you do so, Mr. Black?"

"Do not call me Mr. Black," said the other. "Call me by a less formal title. I sent for you, Mary, because I have much to tell you, because I love you."

Ben Black caught the girl in his arms, drew her toward him, and kissed her fair forehead, while a thrill swept through her entire being, and a glad cry arose to her lips.

From the first she loved this man, in spite of reason, in spite of her ignorance concerning him, in spite of herself.

"Oh, Ben!" she sighed, resting her head upon his shoulder. "It is all so strange, so new. Why, we only saw each other for the first time last night."

"No, Mary, I have seen you often, but you did not know it, and, from the first, I have loved you and desired to make you my wife."

The girl released herself and said, slowly:

"You drove my brother from home and you have made my father very angry with mother. Why did you do that if you loved me? Oh, Ben, Ben, I love you, but these questions will come!"

"Your brother, as you call him, is a wild fellow and unworthy of your, love, and Mrs. Valleo has been my life-long enemy."

"My mother your enemy?"

"Yes, and what I have done is but the punishment for the evil she did to the one I loved."

"What do you mean?"

"Your mother, as you call her, was the cause of my father's ruin and disgrace," answered Black, "and not until I pay back the debt I owe her will my hate cease."

Mary uttered a cry of surprise and fell back a step, looking earnestly into the face of the man before her.

She believed him, in her trust and love, and relied implicitly on all he said:

"Years ago," continued Ben Black, fixing his eyes upon the girl's face to note the effect of his narrative, "my father was a suitor for her hand. She lured him on until, like a child that becomes tired of a plaything, she cast him adrift."

Mary shuddered and covered her face with her hands, while Black, with an evil smile unnoticed by the girl, proceeded:

"He had squandered upon her the hard-earned savings of twelve long, weary years, and when this was gone she cast him off like a worn-out glove."

"No, no. I cannot believe it," cried Mary, her slight form quivering.

"It is the truth!" muttered Black. "She deserted him upon the very eve of their marriage and fled with another. Two years of bitterness passed, for all that time my poor father looked in vain for her return."

"And then?"

"She came back with her husband and laughed at his anguish. For the agony of mind and heart that she caused him I shall repay her a hundred—"

"No, no, you must not. I have learned to love her as a mother," cried Mary, impetuously. "Forgive her, Ben, for my sake."

"For you I might, Mary, but only for you," said Black, and then, as the sound of a horn was heard in the distance, he suddenly released the girl and sprang into the road.

"I must go, Mary," he said, "but we shall meet again. Promise me that."

"Yes, I promise," said Mary, with a deep blush.

The man was gone at the next moment, and Mary put up the bars and returned to the house, singing blithely.

"All works well," laughed Black as he strode rapidly away in the direction of the turnpike. "In three months this farm shall be mine. The old woman nearly upset my plans last night, but now, with Mary on my side and the old man's signature safe in my pocket, I can defy her. Ha! that was a pretty story I told, and

the fool of a girl believed it all. Well, all's fair in love or war, and this is war indeed.

"It's lucky for me that this boy is out of the way, too, for he's worse than a mountain wolf to tackle when he gets his mad up. Ha! he can't help things any now, and all I have to do is to wait till the time comes and the farm is mine."

Reaching the road, Ben Black saw the stage coach approaching and stood waiting till it came up.

"Thar's that thar stranger agin," muttered the driver to a passenger who sat beside him. "Tell ye what, I don't like that feller's ugly face. I kin tell a man's character by his face, and by the eternal, that feller's is a bad one, and yer kin trust Old Vet for that!"

"What have you got agin the man, Vet?" asked the other, curiously.

"Nothin' that I kin put my finger on, pard, but I prospected that feller putty thoroughly comin' down yer last night, and I made up my mind that there wasn't no good ore into him, and by the eturnal, when Old Vet sizes a fellow up you kin rely on the assay!"

"Hold up, driver; I'm going with you!" cried Black, holding up his hand as the coach reached the little rise where he stood.

"All right," muttered the grizzled coachman, as he drew rein; "but if I was drivin' yer to the gallus it'd be more like the real road ye're goin' on, I reckon. I don't like yer, Mr. Ben Black, and some day I can tell yer the reason."

"Pleasant day, driver," said Ben Black, as he clambered to a seat on top.

"Yas, I ain't got no fault to find with the weather," retorted Vet, significantly, "but bad weather ain't the wust thing we stage drivers has got to put up with."

"Road agents are worse, I suppose?" said Black, with a laugh.

"Yas, I reckon so, but that ain't what I was thinkin' on. I had mostly in mind fellers that comes when yer don't want 'em, and sticks their noses into affairs what don't consarn 'em."

"Meaning me, I suppose?" said Ben Black, with an angry look.

"Wall, stranger, if the shoe fits yer I ain't tellin' yer not to put it on," returned Vet.

"I'll trouble you to keep your opinions to yourself, you meddlesome old woman," said Ben Black.

"Never did have no opinions of yer, nohow," laughed Vet, "and as I hain't mentioned no names, I don't see what call you're got to git riled. Get along there!" and Vet cracked his long whip, and the horses dashed along, thus putting an end to further conversation.

Ben Black left the stage at the end of twenty miles, and, after it had passed, left the little settlement where he had been dropped down, and jumped at once into the bush.

"That old fool came nearer to the mark than he knew," muttered the man, "but I can soon silence all such as him when my plans are ripe. I wonder if Valleo really knows the value of that tract? He mustn't find out till I get hold of it. The girl loves me, too, and that may prove awkward if I think of living on the place. If I must marry her, I suppose I must, but if I didn't think it would help my schemes I wouldn't think of it."

Presently, seeing a wreath of smoke in the distance, he went forward more carefully, and soon saw Dan Rafferty cross before him with a pail of water in his hand.

"So-so, young Lew and the Irishman are camping near here, are they?" he mused. "If that boy and I meet, there'll be trouble, and I ain't ready for that yet, so I'll strike another trail."

## CHAPTER V.

### AN UNFORTUNATE INTERRUPTION.

"Now, then, Irish, do you think you can find your way to the place where you left your wagon?"

"Faix, I know I can't, and besides, there'll be four hundred Injines at every turn."

"Oh, no, not so many as that, Dan. You might find ten possibly."

"Oh, wurra! I don't want to go thin. One Injine is enough and too much. I think I'll stay home and kape house and let ye go."

"Then they'll come here and catch you instead, Dan."

"Oh, glory! Wheriver shall I go thin, if there's Injines all over the country?"

"Never mind, Dan; I was only fooling. There are no Indians near us, and you are safe enough."

"Troth I'm glad to hear it thin, for I niver before."

hear av them that I don't have could shivers runnin' all down me back just like the shakes."

Lightning Lew and Dan Rafferty had made their camp in a little opening fully ten miles from where they had spent the night, and it was here in the early afternoon that Ben Black had discovered them.

"If you go to the spring yonder and fetch some water I'll go and find the wagon," said Lew, when Dan had been assured of the perfect safety of the camp.

Dan agreed and Lew went away, returning in the course of an hour with two or three bright tin pans.

"I found these in the wagon," he remarked. "They were just what I wanted."

"For why do ye want the pans?" asked Dan, in surprise. "Sure I thought that whin ye camped out ye ate wid yer fingers and dispensed wid plates entirely."

"We are not going to eat with these," said Lew, with a laugh. "You'll find out what I want them for some day."

"Then I'll not ax ye till ye get ready to tell me," laughed Dan.

"Come with me and maybe you'll find out now," added Lew, as he picked up the pans and started off up stream.

He paused a few times and seemed to be examining the sand of the little stream they were following, now and then shaking his head and then going on.

Finally, after going three or four miles he stopped at a place where the stream spread itself out in a broad shallow basin, the water being scarcely a foot deep and rippling over a bed of sand.

Wading out to the middle of this basin Lew dipped one of the pans to the bottom and brought it up half full of sand and water.

Walking back to the bank he told his comrade to bring another pan and get it half full of water but no sand.

"What are yez doin' anyhow?" asked Dan, obeying. "Have yez lost anything in the river?"

"Hold that pan of yours under mine," said Lew. "Don't let any of the sand run out, but the water may if it likes."

Then the boy began pouring the sand and water from his pan into that held by the Irishman, the latter looking on in wonder.

"I didn't see nothing but some shiny sand," he said, when Lew had emptied his pan.

"What was it ye lost?"

"Nothing. I am trying to find something."

"Begorry then, yez must have lost it if ye're thryng to find it," answered Dan. "If ye didn't lose it, how would ye know what to look for?"

"Hold on! don't throw that sand away!" cried Lew as Dan was about to empty the pan in the stream. "Empty it in my pan."

Dan did as he was requested, but, much to his surprise, Lew let much of the sand escape.

"Begorry, now ye're lettin' it get away yerself," he protested. "Can't ye be more careful?"

"Never mind, Dan, we don't want it all, but don't pour it into anything but this pan."

After several washings Lew found in the bottom of the pan half a handful of the bright sand that Dan had noticed.

"O, ho, it's the yaller kind that ye wanted?" exclaimed Dan.

"Yes. Do you know what that yellow sand is?"

"Sure, it's sand that the sun has shone on, faix."

"Well, the sun will shine on us if we get enough of it, Dan. It is gold!"

"Goold, is it?" repeated Dan. "Sure, I always thought goold do be comin' in sovereigns and tin shillin' pieces."

"Where do they get it first?" asked Lew with a laugh.

"Faix, I've had so little of it that I niver thought to ask."

"Well, it comes like most of the good things we have, out of the earth."

"For all that, ye got this out of the bank, me bucko."

"Yes, sand bank, Ifish," laughed Lew. "Hold on, we must put this in a safe place. Got a handkerchief?"

"No, but if ye won't look I'll tear off a piece of me shirt."

"That'll do. I thought there was gold here and I was right, and now I must find out if there's much of it or only a small pocket."

Taking another pan, Lew dipped up more of the sand and, after washing it several times obtained even a larger quantity of gold dust than before.

"Our fortunes are made, Dan," he cried.

"We ought to get enough out of this stream to start us and then we'll put in machinery."

"And don't they dig for goold, me bye?" asked Dan.

"Certainly, and wash for it, too. This yer is called placer mining. Now and again they come on to a nugget, perhaps a big un, but then they're lucky."

"And phwat is a nugget?"

"A lump of gold, clear gold, Dan, with no ore in it."

"And how big is it?"

"As big as a lump of chalk," laughed Lew.

"Sure, that's no answer. Maybe I might find wan mesilf," and Dan waded out and thrust his hand deep down in the sand.

"Oh, glory, I've got wan!" he presently cried, dragging up something from the bottom.

It was only a common stone, however, and Lew laughed heartily at his friend's enthusiasm.

"Try again, Irish," he said with a laugh.

"Faix, I will," retorted Dan, but at that moment Lew's attention was suddenly attracted by some sound in the thicket.

He sprang to the bank, seized and cocked his rifle and peered into the bushes.

A man suddenly glided out from behind a rotten stump and hurried away, being evidently not at all anxious to be seen.

"Ben Black!" muttered Lew. "What's that coyote doing on my trail? Thought he war bound to Yreka. Durn his hide. If I thought he war up to mischief I'd've drawn a bead on him and shot him as I would a wolf."

"Oh, filliloo, wud ye come here, me buck?" cried Dan, suddenly. "Land av glory, but ye can't guess what I've found, me bye?"

"What is it?" asked Lew, returning to the bank.

"Phwat do ye call this?" asked Dan, holding out a yellow lump as big as his fist.

"Where did you get it?"

"Down here at me feet, begob."

"That's a nugget. You're in luck, Dan."

"Troth thin, it's better to be born lucky than wid sinse sometimes," laughed Dan. "And so that's a nugget? Faix, it looks like a peraty just, but I'm thinking I'd not like to put me teeth in it."

"Come on, Dan," said Lew, hastily. "Put that in your pocket. We must break up our camp and leave these diggings. Ben Black is around, and that means an end to our prospectin' in this yer quarter."

"And where are ye goin' thin, me bye? Aren't we goin' to stay here?"

"No," said Lew fiercely. "That villain is up to some mischief. First I see Injun signs and then I see him, and the two together must mean something. Come, there's no time to lose."

An hour later Ben Black and half a dozen repulsive looking savages came upon the scene lately deserted by Lew and Dan.

"Gone!" muttered Black. "Well, they haven't taken all the gold with them, and it'll be a lucky find for me."

"My white brother has spoken false," said one of the savages. "He said we would find the young pale-face who killed two of our brothers two suns ago."

"He has escaped us, War Cloud. We were not swift enough; but do not fear. I will lead you to him before many suns shall have set."

"Ugh! it is well," grunted the savage.

"I was lucky in changing my trail after all," muttered Black. "Let Lightning Lew seek elsewhere for gold, for as sure as he returns here his life is forfeited."

## CHAPTER VI.

### DAN RAFFERTY HEARS BAD NEWS.

THREE months had passed since the stormy night when Lightning Lew was driven from home, and nothing had been heard, definitely, of the boy, although it was said that he had entered the employ of the government as a scout, and had performed excellent service.

It was a lovely spring morning, and all nature seemed smiling. The valley lying bathed in sunshine, and the cozy cabin of the settler looking more homelike and cheerful than ever.

The smoke curled up from the chimney in blue wreaths, the cows had gone to the pasture, and Mary sat in front of the porch, churning and singing softly to herself.

Presently she sighed, arose, looked across to the valley towards the turnpike, pressed her hand to her forehead, and murnured:

"Three months since Lew went away, and no tidings of him yet. Bitterly has father re-

pent driving him away, but regrets cannot bring back the light spirited fellow, and I fear we shall never see him again."

Carrying the churn into the house, Mary soon returned, gazed down the valley again, sighed and said:

"Nearly two months since Ben went away, and in vain have I looked for his return. Have I done right in keeping my secret? Ought I not to tell him? Mother has explained everything, and there is not the slightest blot upon her fair fame. Can Ben have lied to me? I believe mother to be all that is pure and good, and yet—oh, this suspense, this suspense!"

The poor girl went about her household duties, and tried to forget the sorrow gnawing at her heart, but bitter thoughts would return in spite of her efforts to banish them.

She came to the door again at last, and looked up and down the valley, and said, half to herself, half aloud:

"No news from him, no word, no message. Has he deserted me for another? No, no, I cannot believe it, and yet I feel now that I have done wrong in not telling father and mother, and that sooner or later I shall deeply regret that I ever became the wife of Ben Black."

The grating of wheels, the cracking of a whip, and the sound of voices were now heard on the other side of the cabin, and then two men appeared in the opening in front of it.

One was Old Vet the stage driver, wearing an old blue army overcoat, a broad-brimmed hat, coarse, woolen trousers and big boots, a whip in one hand and a pail in the other.

"Good-mornin', Mary!" the old man said, heartily. "I jist took the liberty of borrowin' a pail from the back door. I'd like to water my horses and give myself a drink at the same time."

"Certainly, Mr. Vet," cried the girl pleasantly. "Wouldn't you rather have a drink of milk? I'll run in and get you some."

"Thar goes the prettiest and nicest gal in all Californy," said the stage driver to his companion as Mary ran into the house.

"Married?" asked the man, who was heavily bearded, wore a suit of blue cloth, neat boots and a black slouched hat.

"Married? No, sir, and she ain't likely to be yet awhile for they ain't no one good enough for her around yer."

"Who is she?" asked the stranger carelessly.

"Wall, wall, you are a stranger in these yer parts," laughed Vet. "Why, that's Mary Valleo and this yer is the Cunnel's house, as yer wanted me ter put yer down at."

"Ah, yes, to be sure," returned the stranger as he sat on a stump.

"And who mought ye be yerself?" asked Vet, eying his late passenger closely.

"Me? Oh, I'm Sheriff Harden, of Yreka, captain of the regulators."

"Wall, yer don't say. Ever seen a man by the name o' Ben Black up your way?"

"What do you know of Ben Black?" asked the other.

"Wall, not much good, I kin bet yer. He was the cause of young Lew being driv from home three months ago."

"Who is Young Lew?"

"Lew Valleo, Mrs. Valleo's son, Lightning Lew they call him. Ben Black told a pack o' lies about him and his mother and the Cunnel driv him away but, by the eturnal, stranger, there'll be trouble if ever Ben Black runs up agin that boy."

"What can he do, a mere stripling?" asked Captain Harden in a half sneering tone.

"Ben Black 'll find out," laughed Vet. "Ben Black ain't no good. That's my opinion and, by the eturnal! I don't care who knows it."

"You're pretty blunt," said the other, carelessly whittling a stick, "but I reckon you don't know the man you speak so freely about."

"Oh, yes siree, I know the coyote," muttered Vet, cracking his whip. "He ain't fit to live, he ain't, and every time I think of him it riles me plumb down to the core. A man that'll swear a lie agin an innercent woman ain't of no use on this earth and if yer ever meet Ben Black you can tell him for me that Old Vet hain't got no more use for him than a nigger has for an alligator."

With that the stage driver took up the pail, dipped it in the trough at the side of the house and passed around to the rear.

"Meddling old fool!" hissed the stranger.

"Well, that is the second time he has dared to tell me to my face what he thinks of me. It won't do to expose myself, though—and even Mary did not know me."

At that moment a rough-looking man came to run me legs off."

around the corner of the house, glanced about and said:

"Wall, Cap'n Black, I reckon how things is—"

"Sh! not so loud," muttered the other. "Some one might hear you. Don't forget that I am Sheriff Harden—and I say, Bill!"

"Yas, cap'n."

"Tell it all around that Colonel Valleo is to be sold up this morning. Let all the men around here know about it."

"All right, cap'n. But I say! I hear that Lightnin' Lew is somewhere in the neighborhood."

"Lightning Lew!" hissed Black, with a start.

"Yas, I seen that Irishman that goes with him down by the Flats Tavern. I had a game o' poker with him, and he pretty nigh on to cleaned me out. The boy can't be fur away."

"Lightning Lew here!" muttered Black.

"Here, Bill, send Joe or Tom to War Cloud at once, and tell him to have a dozen or twenty Indians at the Forks as soon as possible. We may need their assistance."

"I won't lose a minute, cap'n," cried Bill Williams as he hurried away.

"Ha, ha. Matters are progressing finely," muttered the villain, pacing up and down in front of the cabin. "That little note of mine hasn't been paid. Otten keeps out of the way, because I make it worth his while. The Colonel hasn't the ready money, and to-day, in my character of sheriff, I will sell him out to the highest bidder."

The scoundrel laughed an evil laugh, took a turn or two in front of the cross, smiled cruelly and continued his musing:

"The boy out of the way, Mary in my power, Mrs. Valleo silenced or done away with and their rich tract of land comes into my hands. If all goes well, and it cannot do otherwise, I'm a made man."

Darting a look of triumph toward the house, within which he could hear Mary blithely singing, Ben Black hurried away, turned the corner and made his way toward the mining village where he wished to hear news from Williams.

Half an hour later the latter appeared in the tavern of the place, casting a glance around to see if Black were present.

He did not see the pretended sheriff, but his eye presently fell upon a rosy looking, good natured appearing Irishman, standing against a barrel.

"Hallo! reckon I've seen you before, hain't I?" he asked approaching the Irishman.

"Maybe yer have and now ye can look at me sideways if ye like, or at me back. It's all wan to me, Misther—Misther—"

"Bill Williams is my name."

"Oh, Will Williams is it? Oh, yes, I remember."

"No—no, not Will Williams, pardner. Bill Williams."

"Yis, that's what I said, Will Williams."

"No, no, it's Bill Williams, and don't yer forget it."

"All right, Misther Bill Williams, I won't forget it. Phat are ye doin' here at all? Tryin' to learn how to play poker?"

"Ha, ha! that's pretty good, Irish," laughed Williams. "You pretty well cleaned me out o' my dust, didn't yer?"

"Faix, and be the looks of yer coat, ye haven't been dusted enough yet, Bill Williams, and don't yer forget it," laughed Dan.

"No, no, Irish, I mean gold, not dust. Don't yer know nothing?"

"I do faix. I know enough not to come back to this country if I ever get away from it."

"Oh, there's lots o' money to be made here, Irish. Why, in some o' the streams yerabouts yer kin wash out a hat full o' gold in ten minutes."

"Begorry then I'll get a hat twice the size av this one," laughed Dan.

"And if yer've got any ready money put by," continued Williams, "yer can more'n double on it in these parts by buyin' up land."

At that moment a man entered the room and tacked up a printed notice on a post supporting the roof.

"Phat's that, annyhow?" asked Dan, going up to the placard. "Be virtue av an attachment—never moind that—will be sold—all and singular—faix, that's funny, to satisfy a judgment—all that piece of land known as— Oh, glory! I must get out av this."

In another moment honest Dan Rafferty was flying down the road, muttering to himself:

"The ould man to be soold out at twelve o'clock. Faix, Lew must know of this if I have

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SALE BY AUCTION.

THE noon day sun shone upon the pretty home of the old settler, the bees hummed about the house, the oxen in their stalls lowed, as they awaited the coming of their master, and all seemed at rest.

Colonel Valleo, resting upon a stick, came out upon the porch and looked all around, smiling as he thought how some day his land would have increased in value till he could count his money by millions.

He had been sick for a week or more, but now the bright sunshine seemed to put new life in him, and he felt almost young again.

As he stood there, lost in thought, a number of men approached, among them one whom he did not know, a man with a full beard and a dark, evil-looking face.

The others were miners, laborers and small farmers and were all well known to the colonel.

"Good-morning, friends," he said, arising and coming down the steps. "What brings you all to the valley at this time, when you are usually at work?"

"Colonel Valleo," said Black, in a changed voice, "I am the sheriff, and demand the payment of a note given to Benjamin Black by Clifford Otten, and endorsed by you. It is now over due, and unless you pay it I shall be compelled to sell you out."

A murmur ran through the crowd of men, and at that moment Mrs. Valleo and Mary came hurrying from the house.

"Why are these men here? What is the matter?" cried the settler's wife.

"They have come to sell me out," said the colonel, sadly. "That note that I indorsed for Otten has gone to protest."

"Hasn't Mr. Otten paid it?" asked Mrs. Valleo of the pretended sheriff.

"No, madame, he has not. He has left the country, and your husband, as an indorser, is liable for the amount, three thousand dollars, with interest at seven per cent."

"Three thousand!" cried Mrs. Valleo. "It was for three hundred only."

"That's all it was," said the colonel, sitting down, with the aid of Mary.

"The note is for three thousand dollars, and here is your signature," said the sheriff. "You will not deny it, I suppose?"

The settler looked at the paper which the sheriff held towards him, and answered, with a sigh:

"Yes, that is my signature."

"Have you the money?"

"No."

"Then I must sell this place to satisfy the judgment."

"This is robbery!" cried Mrs. Valleo. "That scoundrel, Black, has raised the note from three hundred to three thousand dollars. It is a base forgery."

"The note is perfectly genuine, as far as I can see," said the sheriff, "and I have nothing to do with it. Judgment has been obtained against Colonel Valleo in the sum of three thousand dollars, with interest at seven per cent., for three months, and the matter has been put into my hands. I must collect the money somehow. If you can't pay, I must sell the place."

"But, man, the place is worth a hundred times that much!" cried the colonel. "Give me time and I will settle this claim, unjust as it is."

"Not an hour! The law must take its course," was the answer, while Mrs. Valleo uttered a cry of terror and sprang to the colonel's side.

"Wife, wife," said the poor old man, "if only I had taken your advice, but now it is too late."

"Ben Black has at last shown himself to me in all his baseness," murmured the unhappy Mary, as she stood apart from the rest. "Oh, how I hate and despise that man! No, no, I cannot, for he is my husband, and in spite of his baseness I still love him."

"Gentlemen," said the supposed sheriff, nailing a copy of the notice of sale upon the fence. "I will now proceed to do my duty as an officer of the law. By virtue of a judgment obtained against Colonel Valleo in the sum of three thousand and fifty-two dollars and fifty cents, I shall now offer for sale this valuable tract of land, comprising five hundred acres, including house, barn and other buildings, and the stock, implements and furniture contained therein. How much am I offered? Give me a good bid, gentlemen."

"Two hundred dollars" said the colonel. "It is all the money I have in the world."

"Two hundred dollars!" cried Black. "Two hundred dollars for this valuable—"

"Three hundred," cried Bill Williams, who sat on a stump at one side of the clearing.

"Four hundred," bid one of the miners.

"Five hundred," said Bill Williams, before the auctioneer could state the last offer.

"Five hundred dollars," said Black. "Any more, gentlemen? This is a rare chance, but I really ought not to let it go so cheap. Any more than five hundred?"

"Who wants all that money, begorry?" cried a voice on the outside of the crowd and Dan Rafferty pushed his way forward.

"Hallo, Irish, here's yer chance ter make a good investment," cried Bill Williams. "This yer farm is going for five hundred dollars."

"I'll give six hundred, thin," cried Dan. "I'll not see the ould man sould out if I know it."

"Heaven bless you for those words," cried Mrs. Valleo, coming foward.

"Six hundred dollars!" shouted the auctioneer. "Do I hear any more?"

"Seven hundred," said Williams.

"Eight hundred," cried old Vet, as he suddenly came upon the scene, and that's all the money I've got, but I'll give every dollar of it to help out an old friend—I will, by the etarnal!"

"Hooroo for you!" shouted Dan. "That's the sort av talk I like to hear."

"Eight hundred dollars, gentlemen, for this valuable piece of property. Do I hear any more offers? Once, twice—"

"A thousand dollars," said Williams.

"Oh, wurra, would ye look at that!" moaned Dan. "I say, Mr. Vet, I'll chip in wid ye and buy the place for th' ould man."

"Dash my buttons, Irish, if yer ain't a trump, by the etarnal you are!" roared the veteran stage driver, excitedly. "I'll go yer, durn me if I don't!"

"Twelve hundred dollars, ye black-muzzled pirate!" yelled Dan. "Begorry, ye'll not get the place away from the ould man if Dan Rafferty can prevent it."

"Seventeen hundred dollars," said Williams, and the auctioneer announced the bid.

"Heaven help us, we are lost!" moaned Mrs. Valleo, wringing her hands.

"Seventeen hundred dollars I am offered," cried Black, while Colonel Valleo sat with bowed head, as if awaiting the blow which was to sweep away his home forever. "Seventeen hundred once, seventeen twice, third and last call, seven—"

"Two thousand!" cried a clear, ringing voice, and at the next instant Lightning Lew, the boy scout, sprang into the open space before the cottage.

He wore a full suit of buckskin, trimmed after the Indian fashion, with beads and fringe, a broad-brimmed sombrero was pushed back from his noble forehead, his dark hair hung in clustering curls upon his shoulders, a rifle was in his hand, and as he glanced defiance at the auctioneer, he looked like an Apollo of modern days come to avenge the wrongs of those he loved.

Ben Black's face was livid, and his fingers twitched nervously as though he would like to take the bold young fellow by the throat and strangle him.

"Lew, Lew, thank God for this!" cried Mrs. Valleo, throwing her arms around the boy.

"Have you got the money with you?" demanded Black, insolently. "This is a cash sale, you understand."

"I understand," said Lew, looking fixedly at Black, "and the money is here," and the young scout threw a bag of gold dust upon the ground.

"Then you must have stolen the money, and I can't take your bid," was the surly answer.

"The farm goes to Mr. Williams for—"

"Look yer, stranger," growled old Vet, stepping forward, "it ain't no consarn o' your'n whar the boy got his dust, and if he offers you a bid, by the etarnal, you've got to take it. Ain't I right, boys?" turning to the miners.

"You are!" they all shouted, and Ben Black bit his lip in anger.

"Two thousand dollars is bid," he announced.

"Two thousand! Do I hear any more offers? Come, come, gentlemen, we must not let it go so cheap as that. What do you say, Mr. Williams?"

Mr. Williams did not say anything just then, and for a good reason.

Dan Rafferty, suspecting collusion between the miner and the auctioneer, had crept around

outside the crowd till he reached Bill Williams, being hidden by the latter from Black.

"Say another worrud, ye ugly devil, and I'll put a hole clean through ye," he muttered in the man's ear, pressing the muzzle of a revolver close to his temple.

"Two thousand dollars!" repeated the auctioneer. "Don't you want to go higher than that, Mr. Williams?"

"Say no, ye devil!" whispered Dan.

The miner trembled so that he couldn't utter a sound.

"Twenty-five hundred is bid," said Black.

"Twenty-eight," said Lew. "That was your own bid, wasn't it?"

"Three thousand!" hissed Black, with an evil look.

"Thirty-five hundred," said Lew, before Black had well finished.

"Don't ye dar' say a word," whispered Dan in Bill Williams' ear.

"Can't do it, pard. That's bigger 'n my pile," muttered Williams ruefully.

"Thirty-five hundred!" cried the auctioneer.

"Once, twice, do I hear any more, third and last call, thirty-five hundred dollars! Sold! Where's your money?"

"Where's your note?" demanded Lew.

Ben Black took the note from his pocket, crumpled it up, threw it contemptuously on the ground, and said:

"There's your note!"

Lew picked it up, smoothed it out, examined it carefully on both sides, counted out thirty-five hundred dollars in gold and notes, made a bundle of them, threw them at the auctioneer's feet, and said:

"And there's your money! It isn't the first time you've stooped to enrich yourself by fraud, I'll warrant."

"Hooroo!" cried Dan, capering wildly about. "The farm is saved, and be Lightning Lew, the scout! Hooroo—hooroo!"

### CHAPTER VIII.

#### A TERRIBLE ACCUSATION.

THE sale was over, and Lightning Lew had saved the old house.

"Look yer, mister," said old Vet, the stage driver, as Black thrust the money in his pocket, "you've done all the dirty work yer kin around yer, and now I advise yer to quit."

"I'll go when I get good and ready," muttered the other.

"Then, faix, I think ye're about ready to go now," cried Dan Rafferty, leveling his pistol at the man's head.

"Well, maybe I am," returned Black doggedly.

"Yis, I thought so," laughed the Irishman.

The miners and laborers had now departed in different directions, and Black went off with Bill Williams, stopping for an instant to say:

"You can't blame me, colonel. I only did my duty."

"You get out!" cried Vet. "If I'd ha' known what sort of feller you was, you'd never have come yer on my stage, by the etarnal you wouldn't!"

"Bah! You're an old fool!" growled Ben Black, as he strode away, followed by Williams.

"There is your note, Colonel Valleo," said Lew, handing the paper to the old man. "Take care of it, for it may prove valuable to you some day."

"Oh, Lew, thank Heaven for this!" cried Mrs. Valleo, embracing the boy. "You came home just in time to save us all. Where have you been for the past three months?"

"Acting as government scout," answered Lew.

"But this money? You have come honestly by it?"

"Troth he has," cried Dan.

"Yes, mother, it is all honestly earned. Dan and I found a mine, and then with my pay from the government—"

"Don't believe a word av it, ma'am," ejaculated the honest Irishman. "He found the goold himself. Sure, I don't know any more about them things than a baby. It wor all Lew's doin's, ma'am, so it was."

"Follow that man to the settlement, Dan," whispered Lew, taking the Irishman aside. "Find out all you can about him, for I suspect him. I have seen him, heard his voice before, but where I can't remember."

"Faix, I'll find out all I can, me bye," cried Dan, hurrying away.

"Good-day, friends," said Vet. "I'm right durned glad that the skunk didn't get the place away from yer, I am, by the etarnal!"

"You are a noble fellow, Vet," said the

colonel in a choking voice, "and I shall never forget your kindness."

"Tain't nothin' at all, cunnel, but if it wor twice as much, it's no more'n I'd do for you if I could."

When the old stage driver had departed, Colonel Valleo extended his hand to Lew and said gravely:

"Can you forgive me, Lew, for the wrong I did you? I take back all that I said that terrible night. It was false, every word of it, and I have been sorry for my harsh words ever since."

"Say no more, sir," murmured Lew, pressing the other's hand warmly.

"Come, let us go in," said the settler's wife. "Come, Mary, come, my boy."

"I vowed that I would never again set foot in that house," said Lew, "and I must keep my oath."

"Until you had proved yourself to be of good birth, you said, my boy," said his mother. "You are now released from your oath."

"Come," said the colonel, kindly. "I wronged you once, Lew, but now you shall be my son always, my own good son. Come! I ask it for your mother's sake."

"And for her sake I cannot refuse," said the boy eagerly, and the re-united family entered the home saved to them by a son's devotion.

The night had fallen and all was quiet in the house when two figures stole up and listened cautiously for any sound of life.

"We must have those papers," muttered one. "Have you any idea where he keeps them?"

"No, cap'n, I hain't. Maybe they're in some cupboard."

"I must have them, Bill, if I have to kill the old man to get them. The boy cheated me out of my prey this morning, but if I get the papers all will be well."

"Well, there ain't no one stirring, cap'n, and maybe we can get in and look for 'em."

"I must have them!" hissed Ben Black. "They contain the title deeds of the old man's property, and once they are in my grasp, the place is mine. I will kill him, if necessary, but I must have the papers."

"Let's go around to the back," muttered Williams.

The men disappeared, and presently Mrs. Valleo appeared in the doorway with a lighted candle in her hand.

"I thought I heard voices," she muttered, as she came down the steps. "I hope no one has tried to rob us, but some terrible fear has taken possession of me, and I cannot shake it off. Father! Lew! Come out, I am afraid something has happened."

She passed around the house in the direction of the barn, and a moment later the old man appeared.

"What's the matter, mother?" he called. "Mother! I say, mother, why do you not answer?"

"Silence!" cried Ben Black, suddenly springing up from behind a mass of bushes and darting forward.

Mrs. Valleo was now in the barn and heard nothing.

"What does this mean, who are you and what do you want?" cried the colonel, coming down.

"Colonel Valleo, you must give me those papers, the title deeds," hissed Black. "You cheated me to-day, but now you cannot escape."

"Never, while I have life, shall I give them up!" cried the colonel, attempting to retreat.

The villain seized him and a struggle ensued.

"Help! Help!" cried the old man. "Lew, Mary, mo—"

"Curse you, be quiet!" hissed Black, as he plunged a knife into the poor old man's breast.

The colonel gasped, relaxed his grasp upon his murderer and fell upon the ground in front of his door.

"Dead!" hissed Ben Black, bending over the motionless form. "Well, he would have it so. The old man dead, Mary my wife, the boy and old woman out of the way and all is mine! Now for the papers. Where in the fiend's name are they?"

"Sh! Come away, cap'n; some one is coming!" cried Williams, in a hoarse whisper.

The two ruffians leaped the fence and dashed away through the thicket in the direction of the road.

"Father!" cried Mrs. Valleo, coming from the barn; "where are you? Did you call? Did—"

She suddenly paused, overcome with horror, for there at her feet lay the body of her husband, the white, upturned face, the red spot on the breast, telling her of some dreadful deed just committed.

"Oh, Heaven! what is this?" cried the poor woman, falling upon her knees. "My husband murdered—those two men—the angry voices I heard! Ah! I see it all! They tried to rob him, he resisted, and they took his life! Husband—husband! Speak to me! For God's sake speak!"

The dying man slowly opened his eyes, his lips moved, and he muttered faintly:

"Wife, I am dying. Call Mary—and Lew—quick—I am—"

"Who can have done this?" wailed the wretched woman, picking up a blood-stained knife that lay just at his feet. "Mary—Lew—help! Your father has been murdered!"

Then she sprang up, still holding the evidence of the awful deed in her hand as Mary and Lew came running from the house.

The young scout sprang to his father's side, kneeled and lifted the old man's head from the ground, as he eagerly cried:

"Father, father, speak! Who has done this? Tell me that you are not hurt!"

"My boy," gasped Colonel Valleo, "I am wounded to the death. Good-bye, my boy, good-bye, wife, good—"

"In Heaven's name, father, tell me who it was that struck the blow! Tell me, that I may tear out his cowardly heart!"

The colonel gasped, partly raised himself, thrust his hand into the breast of his coat, took out a packet of papers and said:

"Take these papers, my boy. Guard them with your life, they are the title deeds of all the property hereabouts given me by Spanish grants. Good-bye, my children, good-bye, mother, I—"

"Merciful Heaven," cried Lew, hurriedly thrusting the papers into the bosom of his hunting-shirt, "let him not die! Speak, father, speak! Tell me who it was that—"

"It was—" muttered the dying man.

"Yes, yes, it was—" "Your mother!" cried a deep voice, and Ben Black, accompanied by Williams, Dan Rafferty, and a score of men, the nearest neighbors, suddenly stood before the astonished boy.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE TRAITOR UNMASKED.

"My mother!" screamed Lew, springing to his feet and facing the accuser.

"Yes, your mother!" repeated Ben Black. "See! the knife is still in her hand."

Ben Black was now playing a desperate game, but he was resolved to win at any hazard.

Mrs. Valleo threw down the knife with a frantic cry, and at that moment the dying man called:

"Lew, my boy—your mother is—your mother is—"

"Guilty!" said Black.

"You lie!" thundered Lew, confronting the desperate scoundrel. "Father, speak to me, tell me that mother is innocent," kneeling once more by the old man's side.

His appeal was in vain, for Colonel Valleo was dead.

"My God!" cried Lew, raising his hand toward Heaven, "help me to find the man who has done this hideous deed. Hear my vow, oh, Heaven, for here, in the presence of the dead, I swear never to rest until I have found the guilty one and brought him to justice!"

"Friends," said Ben Black, in a smooth, plausible voice, "I do not like to give my evidence against a woman, but I swear to you that I saw Mrs. Valleo strike the old man down with the very knife that you saw in her hand but a moment ago."

"Why do you accuse me of this crime?" cried the wretched woman.

"Because—because I must speak the truth!" faltered the scoundrel, his hesitating manner having a great effect upon the rough, untutored men around him.

"No, no, I am innocent!" cried the poor woman, "I swear that I am. There is some terrible mistake here. I came out, hearing voices near the barn; my husband must have followed, I heard loud and angry words, I hastily returned and found my husband on the ground and two men hastily retreating. Hear me, friends, I am not the assassin," she continued, "but," pointing excitedly at Black, "that man is."

"She speaks the truth!" cried Lew, springing up, seizing a revolver from his belt and leveling it at Black.

The man acted with the greatest coolness, knowing well the desperate position he was in.

"Don't be rash, young one," he said with great calmness. "You will gain nothing by taking my life, and you will only hasten your own death and imperil the lives of all your friends. Listen to reason. Where have you been for the last three months?"

"Away from home," said Lew.

"Then you know nothing of the terrible quarrels which have taken place between your father and mother in that time, but every one else knows all about it?"

"It is false!" cried Lew.

"It is the truth!" replied Black moving around till he was directly behind Mary Valleo.

"Your proof?" demanded Lew.

"The colonel's own daughter told me so."

"Speak, Mary, can this be so?" gasped Lew, in surprise.

"Say yes!" hissed Black in Mary's ear. "It is I, Ben Black, your husband, who commands you."

Mary gave a start, covered her face with her hands for an instant, glanced half around, saw Ben Black's eyes fixed upon her, and said:

"Yes, father and mother had frequent quarrels, and bitter ones, but I know that she did not murder him."

"No, no, we never quarreled," cried Mrs. Valleo. "Our disputes were of no account, they were not serious; they were solely on Lew's account; but to-day the colonel asked my boy's pardon, and acknowledged that he had wronged him. What motive could I have for killing him after that?"

"For money," muttered Black. "This farm is a valuable one, and with the colonel dead, you could sell it. But we are wasting time. Boys," turning to the crowd, "this woman is accused of murdering her husband. You have heard the evidence. What do you say, guilty, or not guilty?"

"Guilty!" came the solemn reply from nearly all present.

"You hear!" cried Black, turning toward Lew and his friends, Dan and Old Vet having joined the latter. "Why, this is the most cowardly murder I ever heard of. The colonel was my friend, men," turning towards the miners, "my dearest friend and the best man I ever knew; we were like brothers, and now, in a moment, he is struck down by this avaricious woman, for the sake of the money he possesses."

"It's a shame! She ought to hang for it. Up with her!" cried the excited miners, pressing forward.

"Stop!" cried Lew, advancing. "What would you do? This is my mother, the one woman in all the earth whose name I am bound to defend. You have condemned her unheard, without the slightest evidence. Think of the days when you were boys and tell me if you would not have stood up for your mothers against the world. There's not a man among you who would not!"

"No, so we wouldn't," muttered some of the men.

"And that is what I shall do!" Lew continued, with flashing eyes, "stand up for my mother against the whole world and defend her good name with my life!"

"The law must be satisfied!" hissed Ben Black.

"Law!" echoed Lew. "What do you know of law? You are a captain of regulators. What do such men care for law? They do not know what it is. I want no such law as that, I demand justice."

"Yas, and by the eturnal you shall have it!" muttered Old Vet, in a deep tone.

"Stand aside!" yelled Ben Black. "We want no more sermons. The woman must swing for her crime. Now, then, boys, up with her!"

"Yes, up with her!" cried a dozen voices, as the men sprang toward the unhappy woman.

Mrs. Valleo screamed and ran to Lew's side, the young scout quickly springing in front of her, flanked by Dan and Old Vet.

"You shall not touch her!" he cried, covering the foremost men with his pistols. "Back, every man of you. Touch a hair of her head and you die!"

"Them's my sentiments, too!" muttered Old Vet.

"The man that harms either the bye or his mother is as good as a corpse, begorry!" exclaimed Dan, aiming at Ben Black.

The lynchers fell back for a moment, as if undecided what to do in the face of such decided opposition.

"The law must take its course," hissed Ben Black, dashing forward. "We have made up our minds, and she must hang!"

"Ah! I know you now!" cried Lew, suddenly. "Behold your leader, my men!"

With the quickness of thought Lightning Lew sprang upon the ruffian, tore the beard from his face, and revealed him in his true character.

"Ben Black!" cried the miners.

"Ay, Ben Black, the man who drove me from home, the man who would have beggared us, the man who murdered my father!"

In another instant Lew would have sprung upon the scoundrel and choked the truth from his lying lips, but Mary, with a scream, threw herself in front of the man, and with hands outstretched cried wildly:

"Spare him, in Heaven's name spare him. He is my husoand!"

## CHAPTER X.

### OLD VET SPEAKS HIS MIND PLAINLY.

THERE were sad times at the settler's cabin in the valley, and the settlement was plunged in grief.

The funeral of Colonel Valleo was appointed to take place on the third day after his death, and this time had now arrived.

Ben Black had escaped on the night of the murder, and had not since been seen in the settlement, or near it.

Mary Valleo had fled with him, it was supposed, and no one knew her whereabouts, but that she had joined her villainous husband there was now no doubt.

No one believed that Mrs. Valleo had killed the colonel, and the poor woman had the sympathy of all the neighbors.

The tide of sentiment ran very strong in the settlement, and Ben Black would have stood a small chance for his life if he had appeared at this time.

There was no proof that he had killed Colonel Valleo, but he was now known to be at the head of a band of outlaws, calling themselves vigilantes in order to conceal the true nature of their acts and a judge and jury would soon have been found to condemn and hang him.

All the settlement came to the funeral, and, although the affair was perfectly decorous, the rough men of the neighborhood did not hesitate to express very decided opinions concerning Black and the men that were with him on the night of the murder.

"Thar's some on 'em what war red hot to hang that poor woman 'cause Ben Black said they'd orter, a settin' down yer know," said Old Vet, "with no more shame nor a coyote, and if this warn't a solemn occasion I'd just like to see 'em run out o' town, I would, by the eturnal, though, if hangin' warn't too good for the pesky critters, I'd like ter say ter string up right yer."

"Niver mind them, Mr. Wet," said Dan. "They was excited that night and if that's the worst we can find agen 'em we'll let them go but if I could see that vilyan of a Bill Williams I'd send him to dancin' on nothin' in short order."

The objectionable spectators gradually went away, however, of their own accord, having evidently discovered that their presence was not desired.

The body of the Colonel was laid away in a quiet spot on the hillside back of the house, a rough block of stone marking the place where he rested, and thus the neighbors dispersed to their several homes.

The veteran stage driver remained with Lew and the widow until nearly dark and then set out for his lonely cabin on the other side of the mountain.

He was proceeding along an unfrequented road when suddenly, as the moon emerged from a bank of clouds, he saw three men approaching.

"Durned if I ain't sorry I left my gun to hum," he muttered, "for if thar aren't the three most pestiferous cusses in the hull country."

"Good evening, Mr. Vet," said Bill Williams, who was one of the trio, as the party came up.

"It's tarnation lucky fur you that you can tell whether it's a good evenin' or no, Bill Williams," returned Vet. "fur, if you'd been caught sneakin' around these yer parts in the last day or so, yer ugly carcass wouldn't ha' been wuth the price of a plug o' musty terbacker."

"What did you bid agin me at the sale, tother day, fur?" demanded Williams.

"To keep yer dirty hands offin the property, that's why. I knowed who yer was biddin' fur, yer onmannerly skunk. Any seven year old kid knows that you've got no money o' yer

It war Ben Black what yer war biddin' for, and he paid yer well fur yer dirty work, I'll be bound, and as fur biddin' agin yer, it war a public voodoo and I had a right to bid agin yer and agin anybody I took a notion ter."

"You're a meddling old fool," spoke up a second man, whom Vet had already recognized as Otten.

"I don't ax yer for no 'pinion o' yourn, Clif Otten, and I don't want it, nuther," said Vet. "It ain't wuth takin' count of, nohow. How about that note o' yourn to Ben Black, what the cunnel endorsed fur yer?"

"None o' yer affairs," growled Otten. "You dig on your land and I'll dig on mine."

"Yer took mighty good care not ter be on hand when the sale come off, didn't yer? Yer was out o' the country, folks said. Why in tarnation didn't yer stay out? Did anybody send fur ye? I hain't hearn that any on us missed ye, 'cept them what yer owe."

"It's none o' yer durned business what I owe, or who I owe, you blamed ole woman," retorted Otten, angrily. "I've a lickin' good mind to put a couple o' bullets in yer and stop yer ever lastin' jaw."

"Serve him good and right if you did," added the third man of the group.

"So it's you, is it, Ben Black?" said Vet. "Nice comp'ny, you are, fur fellers what calls themselves honest, you are. Never did think much o' Otten, and I think less now, seein' him in your comp'ny. Don't know any wusser, unless it's the old devil's, but even that's better'n yourn. Satan lets folks know what he's about, but you're one o' them sneakin' hypocrites what go 'round purtendin' to be so monstrous good all the time. They're meaner'n coyotes and is a lookin' fur what they kin devour."

"Curse you!" hissed Black, with his hand on a pistol. "I've a mind to shoot your garrulous old head off. Say another word and I will."

"Go on, shoot!" said Vet, with provoking coolness. "I ain't got no gun nor nuthin', and they's three o' ye to one. Don't matter a bit to ye that I'm a unarmed old man. That's just the kind yer allers fights, Ben Black, the helpless and defenseless. Tain't nuthin' new fer yer to take a advantage like that."

"You infernal old meddler?" hissed Black, "I could kill you for that. Take care, you dodging old fool, or you may make me forget myself."

"I never injured chick or child, Ben Black," said the old man, "and I ain't afeared to die when my time comes. I ain't afeard to say what I think, nuther, and if yer don't like my speakin' in my mind out, yer didn't orter listen, that's all I are got to say."

"Don't bother with the old fool, Ben," interposed Otten. "Come on, it's gettin' late."

"I wor to Cunnel Valleo's funeral this afternoon," said the stage driver. "I didn't see none o' you uns thar, and fur a good reason."

"Then they haven't arrested his wife yet, have they?" asked Black.

"No, they hain't, and they're aren't likely to, nuther, by the Eternal, they ain't."

"That woman committed the murder and I'll swear to it!" muttered Otten.

"Reckon yer will," retorted Vet, with a dry cough. "Reckon they ain't much yer wouldn't swear ter, if it jibed with yer puppus. Reckon Bill Williams'd swear to it, too, if yer was to ax him kind o' partic'lar, but if I war axed about it, I'd swear that it war one of you three, and I'd be willin' ter leave out Otten and Bill Williams."

"Take care!" growled Ben Black. "You may know too much, and perhaps a bullet in your brain will keep you quiet."

"Yes, and that'll make another murder to yer account, Ben Black, for, as I live, I believe that it war yer hand what sent Cunnel Valleo to his last account."

"Curse you for a meddling old fool. I've a mind—"

Otten and Williams seized the man's arms before he could do any mischief, or that hour might have been the stage driver's last.

"Come, come. Don't waste any more time on the old gabbler," muttered Otten. "He isn't wuth powder n' shot. Come, we're late as it is."

"You're right!" hissed Black, as he went away with Otten and Williams, turning once to add:

"That tongue of yours will be the death of you, one of these days, old man. Better keep a firmer rein upon it."

"Maybe it will," muttered Vet, as he went off in the opposite direction, "but I hain't

never yet been afeared to speak the truth, and, by the eternal, I hope I never will!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### LEW RESCUES AN INDIAN PRINCESS.

"COME, Dan, we must go and get something for the house," said Lightning Lew, one pleasant morning, a few days after the funeral of Colonel Valleo. "I saw some ba'r tracks up near the canyon yesterday, and we ought to run across him."

"You go and shoot the crather, thin, and I'll make a fire and put on the pot, so as to be ready for ye."

"You're afraid, Dan," laughed Lew. "I believe you'd run the moment you saw a b'a'r."

"Why wouldn't I, thin?" returned the jolly Irishman. "Thim bears is so powerful shtrong in their arrums that I have no desire to get a hug from thim. They're worse than Kate Brophy in Ireland, who could break a man's ribs when she hugged 'um."

"What's to hinder putting a bullet in her, Dan?" asked Lew, with a laugh.

"A bullet in Kate Brophy, is it? Oh, wurra! that 'ud be murdher intirely."

"No, I mean put a bullet into the b'a'r."

"Faix, he wudn't let me, or if I fired, I'm that bad on the aim that I might shoot ye instead and that 'ud be turrible, me bye."

"Well, then," said the boy scout, laughing, "I tell yer how we can fix it."

"Whisper! Don't let any av the bears hear ye."

"Why, you can aim at me and then you'll be sure to hit the b'a'r, Dan."

"Go on wid yer palaverin' and go shoot the crather if ye expect to have amnything for dinner."

"Oh, but if I leave you in the house the Injuns will come."

"Faix, then, I'll go wid ye, me buck, for bechune bears and Injines I'll take the warmints, as ould Wet calls them," cried Dan, who was not so much afraid as he pretended.

"Good-bye, mother," called out Lew, as he left the house. "We won't be gone long."

"Do not run into any unnecessary dangers, my son," said the widow. "There are evil men abroad and they intend to do you harm. Be cautious, my boy, and avoid them if possible."

"Niver fear for the bye, ma'am," called back Dan. "Sure, ain't I wid him? Sorra a bit av harrum will come to him if I know it."

"There, you see how safe I am, mother?" said Lew, with a smile. "Come, Dan, I expect you to shoot a couple o' b'a'rs yourself before we go home."

The two companions struck across the clearing, skirted the woods for half a mile, and then took a straight line through a ravine towards the hills.

Leaving the ravine they hurried along at the foot of the hills for a little distance, taking the side of a mountain stream which roared and tumbled at their feet, now shut in by high, steep banks, and then gliding gently along the surface deep and silent.

"There's a log bridge a bit further up," said Lew, "and we'll cross the run thar and make fur the place where I saw the b'a'r tracks. There's an Injun village four or five miles from hyar, and I don't want them to see the b'a'r fust."

"Wow-wow! bears and Injines togither!" wailed Dan, pretending to be terribly frightened. "Why, oh, why did I ever leave ould Ireland?"

Lew was about to reply, when a piercing shriek fell upon his ear from a point somewhat in advance of him.

Without an instant's hesitation he dashed forward in the direction of the sound, followed by Dan.

The stream had taken a bend, but the travelers had kept on in a straight line so as to intercept it when it returned to its old course.

Lew reached it in a few moments, at a point where a fallen tree had been thrown across from bank to bank, serving as a bridge to those who passed this way.

The young scout glanced hastily around, but could see nothing, and was about to call to Dan, when the cry that had startled him before was now repeated, under his very feet as it seemed.

In an instant he was upon this rude bridge and the cause of that wild cry was revealed.

Below, struggling in the mad waters of the mountain torrents, and clinging despairingly to the root of a tree which had somehow made its way between the rocks nearly to the water's edge, was a young Indian girl of surpassing

beauty, the utmost terror depicted upon her face.

It could be easily seen that her strength was rapidly failing, and that even if the slender root to which she clung continued to stand the strain upon it, which seemed extremely doubtful, she could sustain her hold upon it for only a short time.

"Come, Dan, come quick!" shouted the boy, unslinging his rifles, casting off his belt and throwing all upon the bank.

Dropping to his knees upon the tree, Lew quickly swung himself off, caught by his hands, dropped to his full length, hung for an instant, glanced swiftly down, and then dropped into the stream.

The water was deep as well as swift, and the boy sank over his head when he struck the current.

He arose in an instant, close beside the Indian girl, whom he seized with one hand and cried impressively:

"Let go your hold. I will save you if you do as I say."

It was hardly a matter of choice, for the root, already strained beyond its strength, now parted and the girl's hand fell at her side.

The two were at once swept down stream, but Lew knew his strength, and calling to the girl to make no resistance, swam with one hand and kept in the middle of the current till he reached a point where it was divided by an immense boulder.

The greater part of the stream flowed from here to the right, or towards the bank opposite to that where Lew had left Dan, the part on the left being quite narrow and by no means deep.

With one strong stroke the boy shot into this branch of the stream, where he reached the fork, and in another moment had seized an overhanging branch and had drawn himself to his feet.

"This way, Dan!" he called, and in a few moments the faithful Irishman came scrambling down the bank and assisted Lew and his companion to ascend.

The Indian girl had fainted and Lew now laid her upon the grass while he proceeded to wring some of the water out of his drenched garments, and then sent Dan for his rifles, pistols and belt.

In a few moments the Indian girl opened her eyes, sat up, arose, looked around her, pressed her hands to her forehead, gazed upward and then at the stream, and finally, seizing both of Lew's hands in her own, covered them with kisses and fell at his feet.

"No—no, you must not do that, you must not kneel to me," cried the boy, raising the girl to her feet. "Kneel to the Great Spirit, not to pale-face."

"Pale-face brave save Indian girl life, Indian girl thank him, pale-face boy brave, good. Indian girl never forget. What white boy name? The Fawn never forget it."

"I am called Lightning Lew and I am a government scout."

"Lightning Lew, live in valley, cabin of great white chief, land given him by Indian long ago."

"Yes. My mother is Mrs. Valleo, the colonel's wife."

"Bad man come kill white chief, want land, want house, say white woman kill, tell lies, go away when white boy say shoot?"

"Yes, yes, my father was murdered and evil men accused my mother of the deed, but she is innocent, I swear it."

"Bad man, Ben Black, go with bad Indian, tell him shoot, burn, kill pale face. Ben Black have bad heart, crooked tongue tell lies to pale face, tell lies to Indian. No believe Ben Black, bad man."

"He is a bad man, indeed, and as I believe my father's murderer," cried Lew bitterly.

"Let him not cross my track, for I have sworn to kill him."

"White boy good, brave, save Fawn's life," said the girl. "Fawn cross sun, foot slip, water catch, take away, white boy come save. Fawn not forget, some day do good to Lew, do good to Lew mother, do good to Lew friend. Fawn great woman, princess of tribe, child of great chief."

"What I have done was because it was right," said Lew. "The Great Spirit knows neither white man nor Indian; they are all His creatures. I am glad to have saved the Fawn's life, and I do not look for any reward."

"Lightning Lew good brave, Fawn will not forget," said the Indian girl, and then, seizing Lew's hand, she kissed it, hurried away, and in a moment was lost in the forest.

"She's a strange creature," murmured Lew.

gazing at the spot where the girl had disappeared. "Well, I ain't sorry I was able to help her. If troubles do arise with the Injuns, she may be able to do my mother and Mary a service. And so she is a princess? To be sure, I have heard of her. One day she will be queen of the tribe. She is Ogalalla's daughter. Well, well, whoever she is, I am glad that I saved her life."

At that moment Dan came running up, exclaiming:

"Oh, wurra, Masther Lew, let us get away before five hundred Injuns come and kill us entirely. The girrul wint away like the wind, just, and now she's gon' to bring the rest of the tribe upon us."

"No fear, Dan," laughed Lew, "and now if you'll make a fire I'll go hunt for that b'ar of ours."

"And in yer wet clothes? Faix, you'll catch yer death entirely."

"Not a bit of it. Buckskin doesn't soak through as easy as that. I'm hardly wet inside, and a few turns before the fire will make me as dry as a chip."

"Is it turn yerself inside out before the fire, is it, faix? Troth, if ye do that ye're a quare bye entirely."

"Turn myself inside out, you blockhead? No, indeed, for I might not be able to turn back again, and then how funny I'd look."

"So yer would, me bye, as funny as Phelim Hannagan did when the constable had him up for sheep stealing, and him wearing a lambs-wool weskit that wor hardly cowld yet."

"Reckon he thought he was fleeced, hey, Irish? That's one for you, and now suppose we go arter that b'ar, for we've got to have suthin' for supper."

## CHAPTER XII.

### MORE EVIL WORK.

THE little mining settlement near the home of the Valleos was considerably excited over a rumored uprising of the Modoc and other Indian tribes to the north of that part of the State, and every bit of news in regard to the affair was eagerly sought after.

There were several Indian villages within a greater or less distance of the settlement, and, in the event of an outbreak, it was well to know just how these Indians stood, whether they would favor the whites, remain neutral, or join the malcontents.

The murder of Colonel Valleo became of secondary consideration under these circumstances, and men who would have been promptly lynched a few days before were now permitted to come and go almost without question.

Ben Black did not show himself in or near the settlement, but Otten, Bill Williams, and others known to be on good terms with the former went about as freely as before.

Otten was condemned for the part he had taken in the affair of the sale, and many accused him of collusion with Black and asked him how much money he realized from the sale.

If the farm had been sold it might have gone hard with Otten, but as it was still in the possession of Mrs. Valleo and as matters of greater moment were then pressing, nothing was done in the matter.

Affairs were in this condition, when, several days after Lew's adventure in the woods, Ben Black, Otten, Bill Williams and a man named Joe Ferry met in a dilapidated hut standing well back from the road among a thick growth of scrub oak, four or five miles from the settlement.

"Have any of you seen Lew Valleo?" asked Black.

Otten shook his head and Williams said:

"I hain't for one, aad I don't want ter. I seen that wild Irishman what goes with him this mornin' and he 'lowed as how I'd better skin out."

"I went to the house, cap'n," said Joe, "but there weren't no one round fust off 'cept the old woman, but later on the boy come, and as good as told me that my shadder was better on the road than across his door-sill, and that I'd better mosey if I knew what was good fur me."

"Did you go into the house?"

"Yas."

"Did you find out if the colonel's papers are kept there?"

"Couldn't tell, cap'n. Didn't see nuthin' of 'em."

"Did you look?"

"Sartin. The old woman went to two or three lockers she had in the room, and I see the inside of them, but nuthin' else."

"The cunnel used ter keep 'em in a cupboard in his own room," muttered Otten, "and I reckon they're thar yet."

"We must have them at all hazards," growled Black, with an evil look. "I have set my heart on getting that land, and once I put my fingers upon those title deeds it's as good as mine."

"Without them Mrs. Valleo cannot prove her right to the property were her claim contested in the courts and I'd give a thousand dollars to get hold of them."

"That's a fair offer, cap'n, and I don't mind if I take it up," said Williams. "Don't the gal know anything about 'em?"

"If she does she won't tell, and I can't bother with her."

"Wall, seems ter me that as she's yer wife, all yer've gotter do is ter get rid o' Lightning Lew and the old woman and the whole thing belongs to you as the husband of the gal."

"Yes, unless the colonel made a will," muttered Black.

"Well, if he did, it'll be all right if you kin get hold o' the papers."

"And so I will!" hissed Black. "Meet me a mile from the tavern, at midnight. I have a plan by which we may succeed."

The scoundrel then hurried away, drawing his cloak about his shoulders, pulling his hat over his forehead, and muttering as he sped through the darkness:

"That will do it, the Indians will get the credit of it and if I once secure the papers all will be well; the damage can soon be repaired, and I shall be master of as fine a piece of property in all California!"

Not a sound disturbed the stillness of midnight and the inmates of the settler's cabin slept on, unconscious of danger.

Half a dozen dusky forms crept out of the woods adjoining the house and moved silently toward it, bound on no honest errand, as was evident.

A few minutes later they came hurrying from it and made their way toward the woods.

"St! not too far!" hissed one. "We may want to rush in when the alarm is given. I must not lose those papers."

Lew had been sleeping quietly, although lightly, as was his wont, when he suddenly started up, arose and looked around.

His room was in the upper part of the house, and Dan slept not far from him, the Irishman's deep snore being heard at that moment.

"What can be the matter?" whispered Lew. "Something is wrong, I know. Danger threatens us, but what it is I know not."

He crossed hurriedly to the front of the house, where there was one small window, peered out and then darted back quickly and dropped to the floor.

"Who was that? There are men outside. What can they want? Nothing good, I'll allow. I must awaken Dan."

Hurrying toward the Irishman's bed, the boy scout put his hand on Dan's face, shook him gently and whispered:

"Dan, Dan, get up quick as you can and make no noise. Dan, I say, Dan, wake up."

"Howly Pether, what's the matther?" cried Dan, suddenly springing up.

"Sh! no noise. Get your pistols and follow me, there's mischief on foot."

"What's the matther, who is it, anyhow?" muttered Dan, scarcely awake.

"It's Lew. Some danger threatens us. There are strange men outside the house," said Lew, shaking Dan roughly. "Get your weapons, and— My God! the house is on fire!"

"Oh, glory! the Injuns have come then!" cried Dan, jumping to his feet and rushing toward the stairs leading to the floor below.

A sudden puff of smoke, a breath of hot, stifling air, and the crackling of dry wood, told Lew in a flash what had happened.

As Dan hurried down-stairs, he seized his rifle from two pegs above his bed, ran to the little window in front, and looked hastily out.

There was a red light upon the trees before the house, and not twenty paces distant three forms were seen hurrying towards the woods.

The boy thrust his rifle barrel through the little window pane, and fired upon the instant.

There was a yell and a cry of pain, and then came a shot from below, and Lew knew that Dan had opened fire upon the incendiaries.

"Curse the luck, we are discovered! Make for the old place, boys!" cried a husky voice.

"Ben Black!" cried Lew. "This, then, is more of his work."

The boy quickly reloaded and fired, but he

could see no one, and the excited voice of Rafferty now assured him that he was not yet out of danger and that he must leave the house at once if he wished to save his life.

More than one half of the lower part was in flames, and the fire was spreading so rapidly that it would be impossible to save anything.

The clearing was now brightly lighted by the flames, and, as there were no enemies in sight, Lew hastily escorted his mother from the house, and then, with Dan, set about saving what little of their personal effects it was possible to remove in the short time allowed.

"This is more of Ben Black's work!" hissed Lew. "He killed my father, took away my sister, and now would have destroyed us all and our house with us; but let him beware, for, as sure as there is a sky above us, I will shoot him upon sight!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### ON THE WARPATH.

A GROUP of excited miners, farmers, women and children, stood in front of the tavern at the Corners, listening eagerly to Old Vet who had just driven up at full speed on his lumbering stage coach.

"Thar's goin' to be trouble, by the etarnal thar is," the old man cried. "The Injuns is riz up and no mistake. I just passed a reg'ment o' sojers bound for Yreka, an' I drove my hosses right smart to get yer ahead o' em."

"Then it was really Injuns what burned Mrs. Valleo's cabin?" asked some one.

"Well, it mought ha' been, but if I was axed, I'd say it warn't. Howsumever, thar ain't a bit o' doubt that the Injuns has riz, and that thar's going to be a heap o' trouble or the sojers wouldn't ha' been called out. The Injuns has got a stronghold up in the old lava beds, and they reckon nobody kin drive 'em out, but, by the etarnal, if them sojers gets ter poundin' at 'em with their big guns, I reckon they'll bust the place to everlastin' smash in no time."

"Soldiers! soldiers, here they come," cried the boys and young men as a solid column of men was seen coming along the road.

They were led by a detachment of cavalry, Lightning Lew and Dan being in the van, while behind marched the infantry with steady tread.

"Hooray!" yelled the young men. "Hooray! Now we'll give the Injuns fits!"

The column paused in front of the tavern and Lew rode up to Old Vet and said:

"There are rumors that some of the reds in the neighborhood intend joining the rebels and attacking the settlement. Some of the troops will remain here but I shall go forward."

"By the Etarnal, I wish I was as young as you, my boy!" cried the veteran. "You'd see me shoulderin' a musket putty quick. Well if I can't go with the sojers, I can shoot yet and if I run across Ben Black or any of his warmints of Regulators, I'll send 'em to Kingdom Come in no time."

"You can be of greater assistance to me, Mr. Vet, in other ways," said the boy scout.

"Kin I? Wall then, just tell me how."

"Ogalalla's tribe remains loyal to the Government. There will be fighting in this neighborhood beyond a doubt, and I wish my mother was removed to a place of safety. Our house is in ruins and she can no longer stay there, but if you will take her to the Indian village she will be safe."

"I'll do it, boy, I will, by the etarnal. The old chief is a good feller and he ain't goin' in with any o' these hotheads. I'll take yer mother thar in a brace o' shakes."

"Do so, Mr. Vet, without delay. I must go on at once."

In a few moments the column moved forward once more and in a short time all that could be seen of it was a cloud of dust in the distance.

Mrs. Valleo and a number of women and children from the settlement went at once to the Indian village where they were given a cordial welcome by the old chief and his people.

A young Indian maiden, picturesquely clad, after the manner of her people, with dark glistening hair flowing over her well-rounded shoulders, came forward, took the widow's hand and said:

"Indian girl glad to see mother of young white chief. Lightning Lew save the Fawn's life, Indian girl never forget. White woman safe with daughter of Ogalalla."

"I thank you," said the poor distracted woman. "I know that you are good and kind and I thank you for my own sake and for my boy's. He would have done the same for any

He has a kind heart and would not will any helpless creature perish, be she white or Indian."

"White chief good brave, the Fawn will not forget, white squaw safe with Ogalalla," repeated the girl. "This tent yours, all yours. The Fawn cannot do too much for the mother of the young paleface."

"Surely it was the hand of Providence that sent my boy to the aid of that generous girl when she was in danger," mused Mrs. Valleo, when the Indian princess had departed. "They say that an Indian never forgets a kindness, and I believe it."

Later in the day the troops came to the Indian encampment and Lew saw his mother once more.

"My boy, you are not hurt?" cried the widow.

"No, mother, I haven't a scratch. We had a brush with the redskins but they fled to the lava beds and for the present we cannot dislodge them."

"There will be no fighting here?" asked Mrs. Valleo, anxiously.

"No, mother, none. The old chief remains true and none of his warriors will join the hostiles. You are entirely safe."

Towards evening orders came for the troops to return to the fort, distant a few miles, and Lew announced his intention of going with them.

"Oh, my boy," cried the fond mother taking his hand as he sat in the saddle, "some terrible fear oppresses me, some dark presentiment hangs over me, I do not want to let you go, I fear something terrible is about to happen."

"Nonsense, mother," said Lew. "It is my duty to go and there is no more danger for me there than there is here."

"Sure, you know very well that I'll not let any harrum come to the bye, Mrs. Valleo, m'am," spoke up honest Dan Rafferty. "Faix, I'll take as much care of him as if he wor me-self and I'm not hurted, m'am."

"But you will soon return, Lew?" asked the widow, pressing the boy's hand.

"Yes, mother, in a few hours at most. Good-bye, and God bless you."

Then the troop rode away and with them went many of the Indians, only the old men, the women and children remaining in camp.

It was indeed a trying time for Mrs. Valleo and she could not help feeling anxious.

Within a short time she had lost her husband, the home where she had spent so many happy years had been burned from above her head, her daughter had gone away with a villain, and, if men said truly, her husband's murderer, and now her boy was engaged in a mission of great danger and might be brought home to her dead at any time.

After the departure of the soldiers she sat on a log at the door of the tent, watching the smoldering fire and communing with her own sad thoughts, until darkness settled upon the camp and not a sound could be heard, except the sighing of the wind through the tree tops, or the occasional growl of some sleepy dog stretched out before the fire.

Suddenly, as she sat there, lost in thought, the Indian girl glided up, put a hand on her shoulder and said, softly:

"Come, go in tent, night cold, white woman feel it."

"The men have not returned?"

"No, white man go, no come back yet. Pale-face have no fear, the Fawn will not let any harm come to her. Come, woods cold, tent warm, somebody come, Indian girl keep watch."

"Somebody is coming?" cried the poor woman, eagerly. "Oh, perhaps it is my son! Let me go to him, princess, let me go to him. Perhaps he is wounded and needs my help."

"No, white brave all safe, no get hurt, know how to drive bad men away. Come, the night is cold, you are worn out, you need a rest, the Fawn will watch and let no harm come to the mother of the brave young pale face."

Mrs. Valleo now entered the tent and stretched herself out upon a couch of skins while the Fawn drew the flap of the tent across the entrance and sat just within the door, keeping watch over her guest.

It was well for Mrs. Valleo that she did not know who it was that was approaching, for she could have felt more terrified than before and would have imagined all sorts of evil to her son.

There was a light footstep outside and three men came into the open space before the tent, one of whom was Mrs. Valleo's sworn enemy, Ben Black.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A BRAVE WOMAN'S DEFIA.

ONE of Ben Black's companions was Bill Williams, the other was a young Indian brave.

"Warcloud," said Black, "keep watch from yonder ledge of rock. The soldiers may return at any moment, and I do not want them to find me here."

"Ugh! Warcloud hate soldier! Me watch!" said the savage as he hurried away.

At that moment a peculiar call was heard in the woods, and Bill Williams gave a start.

"Oh Lord! What's that?" he gasped.

"That's nothing but a bird, you fool," snarled Black. "You'd get frightened at a leaf."

"No, cap'n, I ain't frightened," said Bill, "but I'm awfully nervous. The troops are likely to come back at any time and it wouldn't be healthy for us to be found here."

"I know it, but I have work to do before I go. I think that by the promise of presents we can get the most of Ogalalla's band to join us, and induce the old chief himself to wink at the desertion of his men."

"Yes, but you ain't sure of him yet," muttered Williams, "and the Injuns are off with the soldiers now."

"However, that is not what I am here for at this time," continued the renegade, glancing around. "It is my belief that Mrs. Valleo has the colonel's papers in her possession and I want them. It won't do for me to be seen, for I am too well known, and I want you to remain here, and, when all are asleep, secure them."

"Where are they, cap'n?" asked Bill eagerly.

"Mrs. Valleo is in that tent, and she will doubtless remain in the camp all night. Watch your opportunity, and when she is asleep, steal in and secure the deeds."

"What are you goin' to give me, cap'n?" asked Williams doggedly. "I run all the risk and I orter get half the profit."

"Do as I tell you," muttered Black. "If you succeed, you will be amply rewarded, never fear."

"Maybe she's asleep now," said Williams, as he stole toward the tent. "If she is, so much the better."

The wretch was about to lift the flap of the tent, when it was thrown suddenly back and the Indian girl sprang out and stood before the astonished outlaws.

"What does Ben Black want in the camp of the great chief!" she demanded, sternly, waving back the two villains.

"What business of yours is it what I want?" snarled Black.

"What do you seek here, I say, Ben Black?" repeated the Fawn. "Is it the white maiden, the sister of Lightning Lew or the mother you want?"

"Mrs. Valleo would no doubt be pleased to see me," laughed the outlaw chief, while Williams fell back out of the way.

"So would the spirit of her murdered husband," said the girl, sternly.

"The devil!" hissed Black, glancing uneasily around.

"Ha!" cried Fawn, "you start; you are frightened. Does Ben Black fear the dead?"

"No, nor the living!" growled the other, glaring savagely at the girl.

"Ha! the spirits of your victims will make you tremble," cried the princess, with uplifted hand. "Beware, Ben Black, your end is near."

"Don't make me forget myself, girl," snarled Black, with his hand upon his knife, "or I will strike you dead at my feet."

"Strike me if you dare, Ben Black!" cried the girl, drawing herself up proudly and darting a look of defiance at the scoundrel.

"By all the fiends, then, if you will have it so, take that!" hissed Black, drawing his knife and rushing upon the brave girl.

She did not flinch, and in another moment the villain's knife would have been buried in her breast.

At the critical moment Warcloud sprang between the two, threw aside Black's hand and said:

"Ugh! White brother no strike Fawn! Fawn, a princess of tribe, daughter of great Chief Ogalalla! Injun never strike squaw! Ogalalla much heap angry if you strike Fawn!"

"The Fawn does not fear Ben Black," said the girl, proudly. "He will not dare to strike her. Beware, Ben Black, your time will come."

The outlaw uttered an exclamation of rage, and the brave girl retired into the tent.

"Ugh! Injun girl much brave," grunted the savage. "She no 'fraid. She heap smart."

"Go and keep watch," snarled Black, and Warcloud hastily returned to his position on the ledge.

"That Injun girl is going to make trouble fur us, cap'n," said Williams.

"Never mind," answered Black; "you must take the risk. Go away now, but when you think they are all asleep, return and do as I tell you. I will go and see Mary, and find out if she knows any more."

"All right, cap'n," growled Williams, as he slouched out of the camp, Black taking his departure in greater haste.

An hour or more passed, and the camp was wrapped in slumber, when Mrs. Valleo, pushing aside the hangings of the tent, came out in the opening.

The fire was low and nearly out, the wind moaned among the trees, and the cry of a night bird sounded dimly upon the bleak air.

The poor woman shuddered, and at the moment the Indian girl came out of the tent.

"What can have detained Lew?" mused the white woman. "It is strange he does not return. I am growing more nervous every moment."

The cry of the bird was repeated at that instant, and the Indian girl, looking around with a startled expression, said impressively:

"The night bird speaks of danger; he gives warning. Peril threatens—perhaps death—for your son—the young white chief—"

"Death! No, no, not to my son, Fawn, not to my brave Lew! To me perhaps, but not to him, not to my boy. He is all I have to live for now. Do you think that there is any danger? It may be but a fancy."

The poor woman was greatly excited and caught nervously at the arm of the Indian girl, seeming scarcely able to stand.

"Come into the tent, you are tired, worn," said the girl. "Come, perhaps I am mistaken."

Fawn led her companion into the tent and drew the hangings, the shrill cry of the night bird sounding from the distant woods, and the wind wailing among the pines.

A stronger gust than usual fanned the waning fire into life for an instant, the light falling upon the form of Bill Williams, as the latter came creeping into the open space.

"Durned if I do Ben Black's dirty work fur nuthin' any more," he growled, as he sat down on a log near the fire, stirred the embers with his foot and threw on some light wood and dry leaves.

"Some one is outside, near the tent," whispered Mrs. Valleo.

"It is no one," said Fawn, "or only one of the women."

"I don't see why I shouldn't make a stake outin this thing as well as Ben Black," resumed Williams, taking a pipe from his pocket, filling it, and lighting it with a twig thrust into the flames until it became a coal, when he puffed in silence for a few moments.

"I'll be lucky to get anything out of it if I do what Ben Black wants me ter, but what's to prevent me from marryin' the widder and taking the whole thing?"

"The cunnel made no will afore he died and everything'll go to me and her, of course, and the children won't get nuthin'. She's lonely now and I reckon would take me for the axin', but if she don't, I kin make her and then good-bye to Cap'n Ben Black and this part of the country."

As the scoundrel concluded he gave the fire a kick, sending the sparks flying out, arose, coughed and looked towards the tent.

"There is a man by the fire, a pale face," said Fawn, looking out.

"A white man!" cried Mrs. Valleo.

"Perhaps it is Lew," and the anxious woman hurried outside only to be met by the smiling, evil face of the outlaw, Bill Williams.

"Good evenin', Mrs. Valleo," said the man. "You'll excuse me for callin' so late, but I've got suthin' very particular to say to yer, suthin' what consarns—what consarns—"

"My son!" cried the lady.

"Wull, no, not exactly," muttered Williams, awkwardly, "though mebby it does indireckly."

"What have you to tell me about him?" cried Mrs. Valleo. "Speak quick, man, do not keep me in suspense."

"Wull, they ain't no use beatin' about the bush," blurted out the man, "and I may as well come to business ter once. You're a widder now, ain't yer?"

"Yes, and you know how I became one!" cried Mrs. Valleo, indignantly, looking after the Indian girl who had hurried off into the woods.

"Oh, yes, the cunnel was killed," said Williams, with brutal indifference.

"Was murdered, you mean!" was the impassioned interruption.

"Wull, mebby so," said Williams. "but at any rate he's dead, ain't he? Now, do you know that I've allus had a notion that you and me could get along very nicely together, and so, if you—"

"What do you mean? How dare you, scoundrel!" cried Mrs. Valleo, with flashing eyes.

"Seeing that you're a lone widder, without no lawful protector," continued the wretch, "why, I've about made up my mind to marry yer, and so if you'll just say the word—"

home, and now you would force me to become that most degraded creature, your wife. No, no, torture me, kill me if you will, but you will never compel me to so far forget the respect due to my children, or to so brutally insult the memory of my dead husband."

"So, so, yer still think well of him, do yer?" snarled Williams. "What would yer say if I told yer the name of the man who killed him?"

"Oh, if I only knew it, if I could but get my fingers upon his throat! As I hope for salvation, I would never release my hold until I had dragged the wretch before the bar of justice."

The outlaw shuddered, for the woman's passion affected him more than he had thought,

"Yes, scoundrel, and when he returns answer you as I cannot, and as you rich serve, with a sound thrashing."

"Wull, yas, I suppose so," drawled Williams, "allus providin' that he does come back."

"Great Heaven, what can you mean? He is not—you have not heard—"

"You'll know in a minute," muttered Williams, hurrying into the thicket.

He presently returned with Warcloud, the latter having evidently been running.

"Big fight, Injun, soldier, pale face all dead, prisoner," said the Indian, excitedly.

"Oh, Heaven!" cried Mrs. Valleo, "and my son, what of him?"



Lew's attention was suddenly attracted by some sound in the thicket. He sprang to the bank, seized and cocked his rifle, and peered into the bushes.

"And this to me!" hissed the desperate woman, scarcely above her breath, while she trembled in every limb. "How dare you speak such words, you wretch, you outlaw, you—oh! I know of no words bad enough. Before Heaven I believe you were concerned in my poor husband's murder, and now you have the brazen effrontery to propose marriage to your victim's widow. Marry you! I would die first!"

Williams appeared abashed by this outburst of righteous wrath, but, quickly recovering himself, he muttered with an angry growl:

"Fine words, my lady, fine words, but burn me if I don't marry ye now whether yer like it or not."

but he was a crafty scoundrel, and he presently said in oily tones:

"Wull, maybe we wouldn't get along together as well as I thought, and I've got another proposition to set before yer."

"Go on. More villainy, I suppose."

"Now, the Cunnel held all his land by Spanish grant, didn't he? Wull, them claims is bein' contested and yer'll have to go ter law to hold onto what yer've got, and maybe you'll lose the hull on it, 'cause women don't know nuthin' 'bout law, but if yer'll make yer claims over ter me, I'll take my chances o' getting anything out of it, and I'll tell yer the name of the man that murdered your husband."

Mrs. Valleo looked searchingly into the small, keen eyes of the scoundrel and, after a pause, said wearily:

"I see through your scheme, Bill Williams. You would rob the widow and children after killing the husband and father. Begone! I will not listen to you. Oh, if Lew were only here!"

Williams caught the last words, low as they were spoken and said, maliciously:

"Stand back, coward, wretch, murderer! You shall not touch me. I would sooner die than be poisoned by your grasp. You have 'Yer a waitin' fur some one, ain't yer, mebby when Warcloud go back," said the wily

"Young white chief kill six brave. Wait for me come."

"Young Lew is a prisoner, Mrs. Valleo," said Williams, with an evil smile, "and his captors are waitin' for orders from me as to what they shall do with him. I can say the word and it'll be done. Shall I let him go or have him burned?"

"No, no, you could not do that. Man, man, have you no heart?"

"No!" hissed Williams. "I've got you by your heartstrings, though, Madame Valleo, and I'm going to push my advantage. Either make over your husband's property to me, or hear me give the order which sends Lightning Lew to his death."

"Warcloud in big hurry. Injuns wait. What me tell um?" said the savage.

"Tell me, tell me, is this the truth?—is my son indeed a prisoner?" appealed the anxious mother to the savage.

"Remember, Warcloud, presents, guns, blankets, firewater!" hissed Williams.

"Young white chief prisoner, going burn when Warcloud go back," said the wily savage.

## CHAPTER XV.

### BILL WILLIAMS OFFERS TERMS.

As the outlaw suddenly sprang toward Mrs. Valleo, the latter darted to one side, seized a brand from the fire and cried in shrill tones:

"Stand back, coward, wretch, murderer! You shall not touch me. I would sooner die than be poisoned by your grasp. You have 'Yer a waitin' fur some one, ain't yer, mebby when Warcloud go back," said the wily

"Oh, my God! And can I prevent this?" cried Mrs. Valleo, in the deepest anguish.

"Yes," said Williams. "Sign this paper, and I will set your son free. Refuse, and he dies at the stake."

"Read it," said the wretched mother, as Williams wrote a few lines on the leaf of an account book, resting it upon his knee.

"For a satisfactory consideration, I hereby make over and transfer to William Williams all my right and title to the estate of my late husband, Colonel Valleo, the said Williams to take full possession of the same, now and forever," read Williams.

"This is some fresh trick," said Mrs. Valleo.

Here is a book. Sign there, and in five minutes you will see your son."

Trembling like a leaf the frantic woman took the paper, read it by the firelight and took the bit of pencil which Williams handed to her.

"Remember your oath, Bill Williams!" she cried.

"Yes, yes, quick, make haste and sign!" muttered the man, with feverish anxiety. "Quick! He will be here in a minute!"

"You are not deceiving me, on your oath you are not?"

"No, but make haste. There is the place. I have kept my word, now keep yours."

Mrs. Valleo spread the paper out upon the

with all your schemes," muttered Lightning Lew, tearing the paper into bits and throwing them on the fire, where they were quickly reduced to ashes.

"No, and for two cints I'd blow the roof of your head clean off," said Dan. "Go an out of this, Mr. Will Williams, while ye have the opportunity, for ye may never get another chance."

"Cuss ye all, ye'll hear from me yet," snarled Williams, half raising his hand.

"Go on wid ye," muttered Dan, "and if ye're not out of this be the time I count six, ye'll have to be carried. One—two—three—"

With a muttered oath the outlaw hurried away, finding the Indian girl in the thicket



Mrs. Valleo screamed and ran to Lew's side, the young scout quickly springing in front of her, flanked by Dan and Vet.

"You shall not touch her!" he cried, covering the foremost man with his pistols. "Back, every man of you. Touch a hair of her head and you die!" "Them's my sentiments too!" muttered Vet.

"How can I trust you; how do I know that you will keep your word?"

"I swear it!" muttered Williams.

"Oh, I care nothing for your oath; it means nothing to me. You are capable of cheating me even now."

"Sign that paper," said Williams, huskily, "and you will see your son within five minutes."

"Do you mean it?" cried Mrs. Valleo, in great excitement.

"Yes, sign, and I will send the Indian to bring Lew to this place at once."

"Heaven forgive me for robbing you, my son, but it is to save your life," moaned the unhappy woman.

"Well, have you decided?" asked Williams, impatiently.

"Yes, if you will swear to me that you will send my son hither, I will sign the paper."

"He'll be here in five minutes. Warcloud, go bring the young white chief here."

"Then I will sign," gasped Mrs. Valleo.

"Me go quick!" cried the savage, darting away.

"Quick!" hissed Williams. "Sign the paper."

memorandum book, read it again, sighed deeply and affixed her name in good round characters.

"There!" she gasped. "It is done. Now send my son to me."

The outlaw took the paper, looked at the signature, folded it up and broke into a hoarse brutal laugh.

"Your son! Ha-ha-ha! Your son is a hundred miles away, for all I know! Ha-ha, that's good, that is. I don't know where your son is, and I don't care."

"Monster! You have betrayed me!" cried the miserable woman.

"Ha-h! What do I care for that? The property is mine now!"

"Not yet!" cried a clear, ringing voice, and Lightning Lew sprang into the opening and snatched the paper from the outlaw's hands.

"Give me that paper," snarled Williams, whipping out a revolver.

"Put that down, or I'll sing a hole clean through ye!" cried Dan Rafferty, and Williams square and let ye have a go at him and try wan rifle pointed at his head.

"So-so, villain, you have not succeeded, mints av fighting."

with a pistol in her hand, ready to fire upon him if he attempted any act of treachery.

"Lew, Lew, my son, my boy!" cried Mrs. Valleo, "thank heaven for this," and the sorely overtaxed mother fell fainting in the arms of the boy scout.

## CHAPTER XVI.

DAN DISGUSTED—BLACK'S ESCAPE—THREATS.

"BEGORRY this is the quarest koind ov foighting I iver saw; it's not at all like the fighting they did be having in the ould country."

"What's the matter with it, Dan? Don't you get enough?"

"Enough, is it? Troth, me bye, I get enough av it and too much, such as it is, but I don't like the kind."

"Why not?"

"Aisly enough phy not. Thim red marauders av Injines don't know how to fight, so

through ye!" cried Dan Rafferty, and Williams square and let ye have a go at him and try wan rifle pointed at his head.

bye win, no sor, they don't know the forst rudi-

"How do you expect them to fight?"

"Like min, av coarse, give and take, toe to toe, hammer and tongs, fists or shillelaghs, it don't matter which, but the sneaking divils hides behint rocks and trees and blazes away at ye like an evicted farmer shootin' an informer or a moonlighter layin' in wait for an excise man. Faix, phat kind av war do yecall that? It's murther, no less."

"Oh, well, Irish, you'll learn the ways of the Injuns one o' these days."

"Faix, I will, whin I get the head blowed aff me. I tho't when we jined the sojers that we was goin' to have some foine times, but it's been nuthin but harassment iver since."

"Wait a bit, Dan, and you'll see lots o' fun; don't get discouraged."

"No, for that's of no use, but the next Injun I meet, I'll blow the head aff him so as to get me hand into ther way av fighting."

Lightning Lew and Dan had remained till morning in the village of the old chief, and news had just arrived in the early morning that reinforcements were expected and that the troops expected to advance upon the stronghold of the savages and drive them out.

General Canby had been treacherously murdered by the hostiles and the uprising had now assumed dimensions which threatened to spread to a general Indian war, and strong measures needed to be taken at once.

The Indians had taken shelter among the lava beds, the remains of a historic volcanic period when the peaks of the California mountains were the vents of subterranean fires, but which had long been extinct.

Imagine a district piled high with great black rocks with scarcely a path between them, and these so strewn with boulders and rough jagged masses of pumice-like stone as to form an almost impassable road.

In this wild region were many caves hidden in the rocks, some of natural formation and others made by piling mass upon mass of the burnt out lava, one upon another, cementing them with mud and thus producing a shelter at least, though not the most cheery looking dwelling.

Once hidden among these desolate, frowning crags, it was next to impossible to dislodge the savages, as the soldiers quickly found upon reaching the outer edge of the lava beds.

The Indians, springing from rock to rock like cats, appearing here at one instant and there at the next, suddenly dashing out from what appeared to be a solid wall of rock, firing upon the enemy and then as suddenly vanishing, baffled all attempts to dislodge or force them to an open battle.

Dan Rafferty was greatly disgusted with this mode of warfare, and said as much to Lew, when news came to the encampment that the soldiers were to resume their march.

Bill Williams, foiled in his attempt to get possession of the property belonging to the murdered Colonel Valleo, had fled, and it was not likely that he would attempt to resume operations in that quarter.

Ben Black had endeavored, by promises of valuable presents, to win over the young men of Ogalalla's band to the side of the hostiles, but the old chief was too wise to give his sanction to such a step, and had warned his braves that they would incur the wrath of the Great Father if they did so.

Black, hating his own race as all outlaws do, had joined hands with the savages and, in some instances, had even invited them to revolt, hoping thereby to accomplish his purpose of getting possession of Colonel Valleo's property.

He had failed thus far, but his was not a nature to give up after one or two failures, but, with a persistence worthy of a better cause he meant to push on until he had gained his point, come what might.

Lies, treachery, even murder were no obstacles in his path, and whatever his master, Satan, suggested, he was ready to do.

Knowing that if Lightning Lew met him in the Indian village, his life would be forfeited, the scoundrel left the place as soon as he heard of the boy's return and hurried to a retreat in the mountains among the lava beds whither he had taken Mary when the Indian troubles first broke out.

"Once let me lay hands on Young Lew," he hissed, as he took a hurried departure, "and we will soon see if he will continue to thwart me. I have sworn to possess those deeds, and I mean to keep my oath."

"If one means fails another may succeed. I will induce Mary to find them for me, if I can."

not wring them from Lew or the old woman, for have them I must."

It was well for his own safety that Ben Black left the village and hastened to his hidden retreat when he did, for the soldiers followed swiftly upon his trail, and he narrowly escaped capture.

He knew nothing of Williams' intended treachery, and it was well for Williams that he did not, for he would have shot the traitor as he would have shot a wolf.

Lew learned from his mother and Fawn that Black had been in the camp, and it was the young scout who had put the soldiers on the villain's track.

"I may be hunted but I'm not yet taken," thought Black, when, from the top of a tall tree he saw the soldiers leave the village, "and I won't give up till the bullet or knife puts an end to my career."

One of the recreant Indans whom the scoundrel had persuaded to join the revolt, informed him of the fact that the soldiers were upon his track and advised him to leave the neighborhood at once.

"I know when a place is getting too hot for me well enough," laughed Black, "and I'm going to skip, but it won't be long before I'm back here again, and then let my enemies beware, for I swear that perdition itself shall not keep me from carrying out my plans."

The renegade knew the shortest road to take in getting away, and, although hard pressed, he succeeded in making his escape although once he was seen and fired upon, the distance being too great for the bullets to reach him, however.

"Fire away!" he hissed, as he plunged down the almost perpendicular sides of a ravine—"fire away, my boys, but one day my turn will come, and then beware of Ben Black!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE CAVE IN THE LAVA BEDS—BEN BLACK THREATENS.

In one of the most inaccessible corners of the lava beds was a large cave, divided into chambers by the natural formation of the igneous rocks, and further strengthened by the addition of heavy oaken or iron-barred doors.

Here Ben Black made his way after his flight, and here he found Mary anxiously awaiting his return.

"You have seen mother and Lew?" she asked. "They are well—they do not reproach me for what I have done—they do not upbraid me for leaving them?"

"No; I have not seen them," said Black. "I did not go to see them. Do you know where those papers are—the deeds by which your father held his lands?"

"No, I do not know where they are, answered the wretched girl. "Why do you ask?"

"I want them and you must obtain them, by fair means if you can, and if not—well, I must have them, at all hazards. You understand?"

"Would you have me steal them, Benjamin?" cried Mary, in terror.

"Yes, if necessary. I don't care how you obtain them, so long as I get them, for they must and shall be mine," growled Black, throwing himself down upon a rude bench at one side of the cavern.

"No, no," I cannot steal," wailed the poor girl.

"You will do whatever I say!" hissed Black, angrily. "Have you forgotten your marriage vows? You promised to love, to honor and to obey, to obey me! you understand. Why don't you do it?"

"Have I not been obedient?" answered Mary with a sigh. "You cannot doubt my love, you know that I would give my life to shield you, but can you ask me to honor you when your whole life has been one of treachery and deceit? No, no, I cannot, and yet, knowing all that I do, my heart does not rebel, and it still clings to you; I still love you in spite of all!"

The outlaw gazed for a few moments upon the beautiful face of the poor girl, and then said with a muttered imprecation and a gesture of impatience:

"Why don't you do as I ask then? Do you call this obedience? I am determined to possess those title deeds, and you must and shall obtain them for me, no matter at what cost."

"I have deceived my mother and Lew," said Mary, sadly. "I have left the happiest home I shall ever have, to go with you, I have wronged them, but I can never rob them, no, not if you were to kill me."

She looked more beautiful than ever as she stood there defying the man she loved, the fire-

light shining upon her pale face, and Ben Black paused for a few moments before he answered in low measured tones, keeping back his rage:

"Don't arouse the evil that is in me, Mary. Do not tempt me too far—do not make me forget myself. Come, come, we are wasting time, and every moment is precious. Once for all, will you obey me?"

"In everything but this, yes," said Mary, quietly; "but rob those whom I love best of all, for you—never!"

With a smothered cry like that of a wild beast baffled of his prey, Ben Black seized the unfortunate girl by her wrists and forced her to his knees.

"Then say your prayers," he growled, "for by the Heaven above us, you shall never leave this place until you swear to do as I command you!"

With a cry of pain Mary struggled to her feet, threw off the villain's grasp by an effort, retreated a few paces, and said:

"Ben Black, you are a coward and a villain. The veil has been snatched from before my eyes, and I can scarcely believe what I see. I hear you, but I can scarcely believe my ears. I would not believe them, but I must. Is this the man who has made me his wife?"

Ben Black laughed contemptuously and said, after a moment.

"Wife? Ha-ha, since you defy me, I will open your eyes. You are no wife of mine. You are—"

"Oh, my God! not his wife," screamed the miserable girl, covering her face with her hands.

"No!" growled Black, with a brutal laugh. "The ceremony was nothing but a farce, the man who performed it was one of my pals. He was no more a clergyman than I am. Ha-ha, my wife indeed!"

"Oh heaven, have mercy upon me," cried Mary, now falling upon her knees, "Ben, Ben, my husband, my life, recall those terrible words, say that you were but jesting, say that you never meant them, tell me that they were untrue, or, if they are, kill me and I will die with a blessing on my lips!"

"It's too late to recall them," muttered the lying scoundrel, "but if you will do as I ask you, I will make reparation swear to me that you will get me those papers and this night shall see us man and wife."

He approached her as if to lift her up, but, springing to her feet with a gesture of loathing and disgust, Mary cried passionately:

"Away. Do not touch me. My blood boils when I hear you speak, and I wonder that I do not sink down in shame and degradation.

This is my punishment for leaving those who loved me. Kill me, if you will; I care not how soon. All I ask is that I may be laid near to my poor father's grave."

"Don't be foolish, Mary," said Black with a laugh. "I might send you out to starve and die, but—"

"I do not wish to live," cried the unhappy girl. "Could I but bring back the past, could I but be the happy, light-hearted girl I was before I met you, I would willingly live in rags, willingly tramp barefooted all over the world, with no covering over my head but the sky, no shelter but the heavens, facing the wind and the rain and the tempest without a complaint. All this would I sooner endure than do as you bid and be lost to all sense of right."

"Mary," said Black, resolving to try strategy and persuasion when threats and force seemed only to defeat his purpose, "listen to me and you will think less harshly of me, even forgive me for what I have done."

"I am listening," said Mary, who loved the false-hearted scoundrel in spite of herself, despite reason, despite all that he had said or done. "I am listening."

"My morning of life was one of hope," continued Black, "youth painted for me in glowing colors a bright and brilliant future. Then my mother died and with her my hopes. My father, too, was taken away, and, with his latest breath he made me swear to avenge the wrong your mother had done him. My first act was to gain your love and confidence and then followed our marriage—our pretended marriage, you understand. Then the demons tempted me, I would be rich, I would possess unbounded wealth. I knew that if your father died I would soon enjoy all he possessed, my soul coveted his possessions. I tried to make them mine by trickery, but the scheme failed and then—then I killed him!"

"You killed him!" cried Mary, in the utmost horror. "You killed him!"

"Yes, and now do what I ask, or your grave shall soon be ready for you."

"Monster!" screamed the terrified girl. "Do you dare to tell this to me? May a curse fall upon you—may the blood of your victims fall like drops of molten lead upon your heart every moment of your life—may the faces of those you have wronged haunt you, sleeping or waking, and may your life be one night of endless misery—may—"

"Silence, woman!" roared Black, snatching a murderous-looking knife from his belt. "Silence, I say, or I will—"

"Hold!" cried a deep voice, and an Indian, who had suddenly darted into the cave from one of the inner chambers, sprang between Mary and Ben Black. "My white brother must not strike squaw!"

The outlaw sheathed his weapon, and then said in oily tones:

"The chief will do as I ask him. I have brought him many presents. This is my squaw, my wife. My red brother will see that she does not leave this place."

"Ugh! Warcloud do what pale face say," muttered the Indian, and then, turning away, he left the place.

"You see?" laughed Black. "These savages will do whatever I ask. They know that Lew has killed their brothers. I have told them that your father robbed them of their lands. I promise them presents, and they do as I bid them. You see that you are in my power. Now do what I ask."

"Never!" cried Mary, still firm, despite the hopelessness of her situation.

"Then you shall die!" thundered Black, whipping out his knife.

Springing upon the girl he hurled her to the floor, seized her by the throat, and raised his weapon to strike.

At that moment there came a startling interruption.

### CHAPTER XVIII.

#### LEW AND DAN ON THE MARCH—THE DRUNKEN INDIAN—IN THE NICK.

"BEGORRY we're on the march once more and now I hope there'll be some fighting," said Dan, as he and Lightning Lew took their departure with the soldiers.

"Yes, Dan, but suppose that you got killed," said Lew.

"Oh, begorry, I niver thought av that, me bye. Wan av them Injines might pop me off like a crow on a fence and that wud be the last of me. Maybe if I jined the Injines, I'd be safer."

"Yes, and then I might shoot you myself," said Lew, with a laugh.

"Oh, wurra, sure ye wudn't do that, Lew, me bye," exclaimed Dan, making a wry face. "Sure, ye'd know it wor me all the time."

"Mebby so, Irish, but the troops wouldn't."

"Troth, ye're fixin' it for me to be killed anyhow we put it. It's a regular heads I win, tails you lose affair wid ye, me bye. If I'm a white man I'm to be killed be the Injines, and if I'm an Injine I'm to be killed be the sojers. Faix, I'd rather starve in Ireland than die in California."

"Fix it the way yer like best, Irish," laughed Lew.

With steady tread the soldiers marched on, a company of horse leading the way, mile after mile being passed in silence.

They had approached within a short distance of the place where the last encounter with the hostiles had occurred, when they were met by two army scouts, riding on Indian ponies.

"The savages have abandoned the lava beds," said one of these, "and nothing can be seen of them."

"Then we shall have to find them," said the captain. "We will wait here for orders."

"I reckon it wouldn't be hard to find 'em," said Lew. "You can depend on't that they haven't gone fur off."

"There isn't an Indian in the lava beds," said one of the scouts, in a decided tone.

"Maybe you didn't find 'em, stranger, but they're ther, I reckon," answered Lew.

This reply seemed to nettle the other, and he said angrily:

"If there were Indians there we would have found them. There's no better scouts in the army than we are."

"Whar have ye scouted, stranger?" asked Lew quietly.

"On the plains."

"Wall, this here country ain't the plains, s'ranger."

"And in the mountains too."

"This yer place ain't like any mountains you wamn!" asked the boy scout.

ever see. I'll find plenty of Injuns for you. Come on, Dan, thar's work fur us."

"What does that boy know about it?" Lew heard the scout say to the captain as he rode off.

"A good deal, I think," was the answer. "He has lived in this country all his life."

"Come on, Dan," said Lew, "that fellow is only a tenderfoot. I'll find out whar the Injuns have hid themselves."

"And begorry, the Injines may find us out first," muttered Dan, "but all the same, I'm wid ye, me bye, through fire and wather."

They presently hitched their horses in a little piece of woods and advanced in the direction of the lava beds.

Half a mile further they came upon a deserted hut standing near the dry bed of a mountain stream, the place having once been used by some wandering prospector or miner, apparently.

"Wait here, Irish, till I go on and look round a bit," said Lew as he went forward.

"Faix I wondher phwat sort av place this is, anyhow?" muttered Dan, advancing to the door of the cabin and looking in.

At that moment and for an instant only he saw the feathered top-knot of an Indian through a window at the rear of the hut.

"Begorry, there's an Injine," he muttered. "I'll shoot the head off him, so I will."

Hurrying outside he crept cautiously around the corner of the hut, gun in hand.

Unknown to the Irishman, the Indian had seen Dan and had made up his mind to capture him.

He also started around the house, but took the same direction taken by Dan.

The latter crept along with the utmost caution expecting to see the Indian's top-knot every moment.

When he reached the little window he looked in cautiously and saw the savage's head for an instant.

"Oh, begorry, there he is; I'll fix him this time," he muttered, as he turned.

The Indian did the same thing and he and Dan were therefore following each other as before.

When Dan reached the door again he looked in and again saw the feathered top-knot for a moment, as the savage dropped to the ground.

"Faix, I'll have him this time," he muttered, as he kept on in the same direction.

Slowly and cautiously he crept on, his gun in his hand, ready to fire as soon as he saw the enemy.

It was beginning to grow dark, and Dan made up his mind that he must do something at once.

On and on he crept, listening for every sound, when all of a sudden, as he turned a corner, he ran against the Indian, who had turned when seeing Dan in the door.

The fellow was not as dangerous as the Irishman had supposed, for he had been drinking some poor whisky given him by Bill Williams, and was in a very befuddled condition.

The sudden collision threw him upon his back, while Dan sat down.

"Begorry, it's no manners ye have at all!" said Dan. "Couldn't ye see where ye war goin' at all?"

"Injun want rum—Injun want fire-water!" grunted the savage. "No bad Injun—good Injun—want fire-water."

"Begorry, you'll get it, then," said Dan, springing to his feet. "Faix, I'll not kill ye at all, but take ye prisoner."

As Dan advanced the drunken Indian arose, staggered forward and fell into his arms.

"Good Injun, like paleface, like fire-water," he said. "Give Injun rum, give Injun whisky."

He was in a very maudlin state, and more stupid than dangerous, for he began to hug Dan and to call for fire-water in the silliest fashion.

"Go an, ye drunken loafer," cried Dan, throwing the man from him. "Sure I thought ye was a blood-thirsty Injine and ye're nothin' but a tipsy fool."

The Indian sat down heavily, and at that moment Lightning Lew came hurrying to the spot.

When he saw the Indian's condition, however, he laughed and said:

"I've got an idea, Dan. We'll make this drunken fool show us the way to the Injun camp."

"Fire-water, rum, good Injun want whisky," said the savage, getting up.

"Where does my red brother set up his wigwam?" asked the boy scout.

"Injun no hab wigwam, Injun live in cave, paleface no find, bad paleface no find, good paleface give Injun rum."

"Show me the way and I will give you fire water."

"Paleface good, Injun good, me show. Injun live in cave, Ben Black live in cave, white squaw live, Injun want rum."

"You shall have it," cried Lew excitedly. "You say that Ben Black and the white girl are in the cave?"

"Injun say so, Injun want rum, Injun good feller."

"Show me the way, my red brother, and you shall have it," said Lew.

The savage smiled foolishly and led the way, Dan and Lew following.

Night had fallen when they entered a pass leading through the lava beds, the black rocks towering above their heads, while here and there the way seemed to be entirely blocked.

Drunk as the Indian was he knew the path, and at the end of a quarter hour he passed through an opening in a great mass of rock, and beckoned Lew to follow him.

As he entered the cave, the boy suddenly heard a startling cry, a cry for help, and in his sister's voice.

Without an instant's hesitation he dashed forward, and found himself in a rock-built room lighted by a fire of logs, and there, in the center of the cave, stood Ben Black about to plunge a gleaming knife into Mary's breast.

"Hold!" shouted Lew. "Throw up your hands or you are a dead man!"

### CHAPTER XIX.

#### THE PRISONERS OF THE CAVE.

AT the sound of Lightning Lew's voice Ben Black stepped back and glared angrily at the intruder with a fierce scowl on his evil face.

Mary sprang to her feet and rushed to Lew's side with a glad cry upon her lips.

"Lew, Lew, thank Heaven, you have come to save me from this scoundrel!" she cried.

"Make one step, utter one sound to betray my presence here, Ben Black," cried Lew, throwing his arm around Mary, "and I will kill you! Come, sister, make haste. We must leave this place at once."

As Lew started to leave the cavern, his pistol still pointed at the outlaw, Ben Black suddenly drew a silver whistle from under his neck cloth and blew a loud blast, which echoed through the cavern.

Then he sprang aside with the swiftness of a tiger at the moment that Lew fired.

The bullet whistled past his head and flattened itself against the wall of the cave.

At the instant Warcloud and half a dozen Indians rushed into the cave, and Lew was surrounded.

He was instantly seized and disarmed, two brawny savages seizing Mary and holding her fast.

"A little wide of the mark, my friend," laughed Black. "Warcloud, this is the young white chief who killed your brothers a few days ago. Lock him in yonder room, and see to it that he does not escape. To-morrow he shall burn at the stake."

"No, I'll be hanged if he will, Misther Black!" cried Dan Rafferty, who suddenly rushed into the cave, a pistol in his hand.

"Fly, Dan, fly for your life!" cried Lew. "Run to the fort and bring the soldiers here. You can find your way back, and if you are not in time to save our lives, you can at least avenge our deaths."

"Yes, Dan, fly!" cried Mary. "Fly for your life!"

"Faix, how can I fly, whin I'm not a birrud?" said Dan. "I'll save yer lives, me dear young leddy, for it's yer brother that saved mine, so he did."

"Seize him!" cried Black. "Do not let him escape."

Two savages seized Dan, and after a short struggle he was disarmed.

"You infernal blundering Irishman," hissed Black, "if it wasn't for arousing the whole camp, I'd put a bullet through your stupid head."

"Do it, ye black muzzled omadhaun, do it. I'm not afeared av ye," said Dan, defiantly.

"Put him in the upper cave," muttered Black, pointing to an iron grating at the back, half way above the stone floor, "and do not give him food or drink; let him starve."

The savages hurried away with Dan, and Lew's captors took him to a room on the right secured by an iron-barred door, Mary alone being left in the room.

"You see that I am master here," said the ruffian, "and I intend to show you that I am. You shall not leave that cell even if you die of starvation, unless you swear to obtain those deeds. You shall have neither water nor food, and if you persist in your obstinate refusal, you shall be left to starve. Take her away!" to the Indians who still held the brave girl.

She was put in a small room on the left, closed by a heavy oaken door secured by two strong locks and a great iron bar.

At that moment Otten came in and said:

"What's all the fuss about, Ben? I heard shots and a lot o' noise and couldn't sleep?"

"That infernal Lightning Lew came here to rescue Mary, and pretty nearly made me pass in my chips, but I've got the young villain under lock and key and he won't escape me now."

"Why don't you kill the troublesome young varmint?" muttered Otten.

"The Indians'll do that for me, never fear. He won't trouble me any more."

"Has he got the papers?"

"No, I think not. They are kept in some safe place. I did not think to search him. Maybe he has them on his person. I did not think of that."

"Where is he?"

"In that grated room."

"I'll see what I can do with the obstinate young cub."

The man walked to the grated door, shook the bars and said, with an angry growl:

"Come yer, youngster, I want ter speak ter yer."

Lew came to the door and said quietly:

"What do you want, Mr. Otten?"

"Them papers. Have you got 'em?"

"What papers?"

"The title deeds to the Cunnel's property. Yer know what I mean well enough."

"I used to think that you were our friend, Mr. Otten," said Lew, "but now I know that you ain't. I haven't got the papers, and if I had you shouldn't have them."

"Yer lie, you've got them hidden away on yer somewhere's. Give 'em up without no trouble or it'll be the wuss for yer."

"I haven't got them."

"Better search him, Ben," muttered Otten, turning to Black.

"Yes, I'll hold him and you search. Look out while I open the door. The young scoundrel is as slippery as a snake."

A long drawn mournful cry, like the scream of some night bird, was now heard outside the cave.

"What's that?" gasped Otten, with a shudder.

"The Indian sentries calling to each other. Hark! that is the answer."

The cry was repeated at that moment, and in a short time was heard again.

"Sounds like a coyote or somebody in distress," muttered Otten. "Can't they make any cheerfuller noise than that?"

"It carries to a long distance," said Black, "and an alarm can be sent to the farthest point in the mountain in a few minutes."

"Well, come, let's search the cur for the papers."

"I haven't got them," said Lew, "and you need not waste your time in searching me."

"That's only his bluff," growled Otten. "We'd better s'arch him, cap'n."

"Yes," said Black, picking up a bunch of keys that lay on a barrel just under the grated window of Dan's cell, selected one, and opened the door of Lew's prison.

"Phat are thim marauders doing neow?" muttered Dan, as, half sitting, half reclining, for he was unable to stand upright, he looked through the grating into the main cavern.

Black threw open the door, and he and others rushed into the cell.

"Begorry, if I had thim keys in me fist once, I'd not stay long in this blessed place," thought Dan.

Ben Black seized Lew and held him firmly, while others searched him thoroughly.

There were no papers or anything of value found upon him, however, and Black asked with a growl:

"What have you done with them, boy?"

"Never you mind. I do not intend that you shall get possession of them."

"If you don't tell me where they are I'll put a bullet through you!" hissed Black, drawing a pistol.

"And lose the secret forever," said Lew. "Fire upon a helpless man, you coward, but remember that you add but another crime to the long list of your offenses, and that one day, as

sure as there is a Heaven over our heads, you shall meet with a just punishment."

"Come on," growled Otten. "He hasn't got the papers and he won't tell yer where they be. Try the old woman. He can't help her now and she'll have to give in to yer."

"I will," muttered the outlaw as he left the place, closing and locking the door after him.

Then he threw the key upon the barrel and said:

"You watch here, Otten, you and the boys, till I come back. I'll be here by morning."

"All right, Cap'n, I'll keep watch in here and them howlin' niggers of Injuns'll keep watch outside, I reckon."

"Don't let the prisoners escape, mind," muttered Black, "for I'll hold you responsible if you do," and so saying, the outlaw left the cavern.

## CHAPTER XX.

### AN IRISHMAN'S READY WIT.

AFTER the departure of Ben Black, Warcloud and one or two of his comrades entered the main cavern and squatted on the hard floor.

"It'll be a cold night," muttered Otten, "and if I've got ter watch here I mought as well be comfortable."

He threw some sticks of wood on the fire, took a drink from a flask which he drew from his pocket, and then seated himself on a low bench in front of the fire and seemed to be thinking.

"Give Warcloud whisky," said the brave.

"No," growled Otten, "yer've had enough. Are any of the boys around?"

"Pale-face in cave outside," answered the savage.

"Tell 'em to come in yer. It's lonesome with nobody but Injuns."

"Faix, I'd make things lively for ye if I was down there, me bye," muttered Dan.

The Indian went out, and presently two or three rough looking men dressed as miners entered.

"Make yerselves easy, boys," said Otten. "The cap'n has gone to the settlement and won't be back till mornin'. I've got ter watch the prisoners, and it's lonesome business."

The dismal cries of the Indian sentinels could be heard at short intervals, now loud and now faint, and one might well have shuddered at the weird, unearthly sound heard at night and in such a place.

"Howl away, ye devils!" muttered Dan. "Faix, if I had ye be the throat ye'd not make so much caterwaulin', I'm thinking. Faix, I do wish I had thim kays down there on the barrel. They do be lookin' up to me wid so tantalizin' a shmile on their brassy faces, that I could almost pull out the bars and rache me fist down fur them."

"What are yer mutterin' about up there, Irish?" growled Otten. "Shut up and go to sleep."

"Yis, I know that I'm shut up, me buck," said Dan. "Ye have no need to tell me that. I'm well aware of it, so I am."

"Have a drink, boys," said Otten, producing a flask. "It'll cheer ye up."

"Go to sleep, is it?" mused Dan, looking down at the outlaws. "Faix, I'm as wide awake as a weasel. Go to slape, is it, whin thim kays is looking up at me so lovingly? No, begorry, I'll not go to sleep if I can help it."

The weird cries were again heard, mingled with the sound of the wind whistling through the passes and the scream of some night bird or coyote in search of prey.

The Indians had already stretched themselves out upon the floor, wrapped in their long blankets, and were now asleep, leaving Otten and his cronies to keep watch.

"What's the use of us boys keepin' awake?" muttered Otten, presently. "Everything is locked up, the sentinels are posted outside and they ain't no chance of the prisoners gettin' away."

"Of course they ain't," answered one of the men with a yawn, and stretching his arms above his head. "I'm plumb tuckered out, I am."

"S'pose we lie down and take a snooze," suggested Otten. "All is safe enough and we mought have lots ter do in the mornin'."

"That's what I say."

"Cert'nly, let's take a snooze."

The men stretched themselves out in front of the fire, their slouched hats drawn over their eyes, while Otten curled himself up in one corner with his back to the wall, folded his arms over his breast, lowered his head and was soon asleep.

All was silent in the cave, the occasional snapping of a stick on the fire or the heavy breathing of the sleepers being the only sound.

Now and then one would mutter in his sleep, or a guttural snore would be heard, but at last even these sounds ceased, the fire burned low and nearly went out, and all was as still as the grave.

Dan Rafferty, in the little low cell overlooking the main cavern, had dropped into a doze in spite of himself, when he was suddenly aroused by a soft touch upon his cheek, and by a low, purring sound.

He started up and thrust out his hand, closing it upon something soft and fuzzy.

"Begorry, what have I got here?" he muttered.

It was a kitten, not more than six weeks old, fat, soft and round.

"Oh, be the powers, if it isn't a kitten cat. Troth, this is a strange place for it. Who wud iver have thought av finding a kitten among them murdherin' Injuns?"

The kitten purred and mewed as Dan held it in his hand and smoothed its fur, and presently there was an answering mew and the mother cat came out from some corner of the cave, hidden by the darkness, and leaped upon Dan's legs.

"Oh, be the powers, there's the mother av it. Here, pussy, pussy, pussy, I'll not hurt ye. Sure, but it's quare company I'm in, at all, but the cats air better than the Injines anny day."

The mother cat, perceiving that Dan meant no harm to her kitten, purred softly, rubbed her head against his leg and went away, mewing softly, evidently looking for another of her offspring for him to pet.

"Well, well, it bates all, so it do," mused Dan, holding the kitten against his cheek and listening to its purring.

Suddenly, as the dying fire flared up for an instant, the light fell upon the keys below, which he had forgotten for a time.

"Oh, glory be to the blessed saints, but I've got an idee!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I'll have them kays after all, so I will."

Placing his face as close to the bars as possible, the opening being half a yard square and the spaces between the bars about four inches either way, he measured the distance from the grating to the barrel with his eye and fixed its exact position in his mind.

The distance was too great for him to reach down with his hand, even if he could have passed his arm through the spaces in the grating, being nearly four feet from the floor of the upper cave to the top of the barrel.

"There's more than wan way av doing it, thank the pigs," he muttered. "If I can't go down there meself I can sind a messenger. I want thim kays and I'm goin' to have them, begob. Aisy now, pussy darlint, and I'll send ye down there to fetch thim for me."

Removing the colored neck-cloth that he wore, Dan made a sling of it, passed the looped portion under the cat's body and knotted it tightly enough to prevent the creature from slipping out, and yet not so tightly as to hurt it.

"I wondher if it's long enough," he muttered, looking down at the barrel. "Indeed it's not, but I have me belt and me braces, and it's a pity if I don't get thim kays up, aither be hook or be crook."

Taking off his belt, he tied the end of the silk neck-cloth to the buckle, and then, pushing the kitten between the bars, lowered it to the barrel.

"Now thin, pussy, bring me up thim kays," he muttered, letting out his strange cable. "fetch them up to Danny and he'll give ye a bowl of milk as soon as he gets out of this murdherin' hole av a cave."

The kitten, suspended in air, was clawing about in desperate fashion, trying to get a hold for its feet, and mewing piteously.

The instant he reached the barrel it closed upon the bunch of keys tied together with a stout leather thong.

The moment that Dan heard the keys rattle, he hauled in on his improvised line and in a few seconds, the kitten had been drawn through the grating, the keys still in its grasp.

"Glory be to goodness, I've got thim," he muttered, "and now to free Miss Mary and Masther Lew and leave this place foriver."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### "TWIXT THE CUP AND THE LIP."

RELEASING the kitten, Dan put on his belt and neckcloth, took the keys and crept to the door of his cell, after darting a hasty glance

through the grating to see that the Indians and outlaws were still asleep.

"Sleep on, ye devils," he muttered, as he hurried to the door on his hands and knees.

Just then the weird cry of a sentry outside the cave was heard and Dan shrugged his shoulders.

"Faix, I forgot them fellers, but never mind. Whin we get out of this Master Lew will find a way to circumvent them, lave him alone for that."

After trying one or two keys Dan found one that would fit the lock, and in a moment the heavy door swung open.

"That's all right, begorry," he mused, as he went out and closed the door behind him, holding in his hand the key he had just used.

He descended half a dozen rude steps cut in the rocks, and followed a passage which brought him into the outer cave.

"Now which way do I go?" he thought, glancing around. "If I was out I'd know the way, but I get turned about in this place. Let me see; I think this is the way."

At the end of a few steps, however, he found himself at the mouth of the cave, and at that moment a dark figure loomed up against the light.

"Oh, begorry, I come nearly puttin' me fut in it that time," he muttered as he hurried back. "Well, it's a good thing I know that there's wan of the Injuns outside, for now we can be on our guard."

Following the passage in the opposite direction the faithful fellow soon entered the cavern where the Indians and outlaws lay asleep.

"Faix, I've got it this time, and now to awaken the bye and get out av this turrible place."

Stepping carefully between the Indians he reached the grated door behind which Lew was a prisoner, and whispered:

"Lew, me bye, are ye there?"

The young scout came to the door at once and said:

"Ah, is that you, Dan?"

"It's no one else, me bye. Whist! don't make anny n'ise and I'll let ye out in a hurry."

After a few trials Dan found a key to fit the lock, and presently Lew stepped out.

"Now, thin, to set your sister free, and we'll give the place the slip, so we will," said Dan.

"Sh! give me the keys. She is in yonder room," said Lew, in a low tone.

As he made his way to the opposite side of the cave the cry of the sentries was again heard outside.

"Do ye hear that now?" muttered Dan. "Faix them fellers did ought to be aslape, instead of howling around out there like a lot of cats, begob."

"Sh! make no noise!" cautioned Lew, at the door of Mary's cell.

He opened it, stepped inside, and called softly:

"Mary, sister, are you awake? It is I, Lew. I have come to save you and take you away from this place."

In a moment Mary was at his side with her arms about his neck.

"Come, there is not a moment to lose. Some one may enter at any moment," said Lew, gently disengaging Mary's hands and drawing her from the room.

"It's there ye are, is it!" muttered Dan. "Faix, thin, we'll go now by yer lave."

"Sh! wait a moment," said Lew. "We must procure weapons first. Hand me that basket."

There was a small basket made of woven grass lying at the foot of the barrels, and Dan now picked this up and crept to Lew's side.

The boy then stole between the lines of sleepers, reached down and deftly removed the knives and pistols from Otten's belt.

These were placed in the basket, and the weapons of the next man were then taken from him.

Moving noiselessly from one to the other, Lew took the weapons of whites and Indians, Dan following close at his side with the basket.

They had reached the fire and Lew was about to remove the tomahawk and knife from Warcloud's belt, when his quick ear caught the sound of a step outside.

"Sh! down with you!" he hissed.

Dan sank to the floor in an instant, and Mary hid behind the barrel, while Lew seized a blanket thrown across one of the savages, and dropped it upon the smouldering fire.

At that moment a painted Indian entered, and poor Mary gave herself up for lost.

In a moment the place was shrouded in darkness.

The Indian gave a grunt and left the place, his cry being presently heard outside.

Lew took the blanket from the fire, blew steadily on the embers for a few moments, until a flame appeared, and then whispered:

"Come, we have no time to lose. Arm yourselves, for we may have to fight our way up."

Dan and Mary each took a weapon, and then Lew led the way, taking Mary's hand, followed by Dan, with the basket of revolvers and knives.

They had almost reached the door, when Dan, striking his foot on some projection, stumbled and dropped the basket.

It fell to the floor with a crash, and one of the pistols was discharged.

In an instant the outlaws and Indians sprang to their feet.

"An escape!" roared Otten.  
"Stop them!"

## CHAPTER XXII.

### SURROUNDED BY MANY DANGERS.

"STAND where you are!" cried Lew. "The first man that advances or gives an alarm will be shot!"

"Curse you!" hissed Otten; "how did you escape? Down with them, men! They must not escape!"

The Indians and outlaws dashed forward, hoping to overcome the fugitives by force of numbers.

Crack! crack! crack!

In an instant there was a succession of sharp reports, followed by shrieks and groans.

Crack! crack! crack!

Lew and Dan fired rapidly, and more than one of the enemy fell, but there was danger that those outside would hear the shots, and that the fugitives would be caught between two fires.

"Come!" hissed Lew, "we must leave here at once."

Mary was already behind him where no chance shot could reach her, and Lew now fired two or three quick shots, seized the girl by the waist, and rushed out. Dan followed, after firing his last shot, and in a moment the fugitives were outside the cave.

Two brawny Indians suddenly appeared as if from the ground, and Mary uttered a scream of terror.

Dan leaped forward, dealt the savages two swinging blows, and stretched them both at his feet.

"Thim two won't bother us for a while yet," he muttered, "but there's more beyond."

"Make haste!" cried Lew. "The men in the cave will give the alarm."

"Indeed, thin, they won't," laughed Dan, "for I locked the dure on them, and I have the kays in me pocket."

"This way, then," replied Lew, taking Mary's hand and hurrying along the rough pathway.

Suddenly, as they were hastening on, Lew paused and then Dan heard the cry of one of the Indian sentinels.

In an instant it was answered almost at his side, as it seemed.

"Oh, worra; it's lost we are!" moaned Dan.

"Sh! I gave the answer," said Lew. "Drop on yer hands and knees, Irish, and creep after me. I'll give 'em another in a minute."

The answering call was presently repeated, and then Dan heard a distant cry from one of the Indians.

"We are safe for the present," said Lew, after a few minutes' interval. "You can stand up now, Dan."

"Faix, an' I think it's about time," said the Irishman. "Me legs is all cramped up wid walking like a baby, and it's glad I am to give them a bit of a stretch."

"Come on, and don't make any more noise than you can help," returned Lew. "We are still in the enemy's country."

"Yis, but that devil Otten and the Injun can't folly us at any rate," laughed Dan. "It wor lucky I picked out the right kay at the forst glance whin I wint out."

"Yes, so it was. I did not think of it myself."

"Troth, and I'm thinking Mr. Ben Black will be disapp'nted whin he goes to the place beyant and finds us gone, begorry," chuckled Dan.

"The scoundrell" said Mary, excitedly. "How could I have ever loved such a man? He killed my poor father and now he seeks—"

"What's that you say, sister?" hissed Lew, interrupting. "Ben Black killed my father?"

"Yes. He boasted to me that he had done it and threatened me with the same fate if I did not swear to secure father's papers for him."

"Ben Black and I must meet before long," said Lew, gravely, "and when we do, there will be a long account to settle between us. It shall end only with his life or mine."

"And if he kills ye, me bye," said Dan, "he'll have me to settle wid, begorry, and if I don't save the hangman a job and crack his ugly skull, thin me name is not Dan Rafferty and I wor niver born in Ireland."

The moon suddenly came out from behind a cloud, and Lew dropped to the ground, being then in the open.

In an instant the warning cry of the watchful sentinels was heard, being presently repeated from point to point.

Lew himself repeated the cry, presently changing it for that which said that all was well.

"There's an Injun over there behind that pile of rocks," he whispered, "and I reckon he saw us before we dropped."

"Do we have to go by the place, me bye?" asked Dan.

"Yes."

"Faix, that's mighty inconvenient annyhow."

"Wait here till I return," was the whispered reply, "and do not move under any circumstances."

"Phwere are ye going?"

"To settle with that Injun," said Lew quietly, as he glided swiftly away.

Five minutes passed, and Mary was beginning to be alarmed, for she could hear cries all around, and feared that Lew had met with some harm.

"Go and find him, Dan," she said to her companion. "Something has happened. I know there has."

"Faix, I'd go in a minute, me dear young leddy," whispered Dan, "but yer brother towld us not to move out of this, and—"

"Sh!" hissed Mary, seizing Dan's arm as they crouched on the ground. "There is an Indian now."

"Begorry, thin, I'll settle him, thin," and Dan jumped to his feet.

An Indian stood within three feet of him, but Dan, thinking only of Mary, drew his knife and leaped forward.

"Sh! it's only me, Irish," said the well remembered voice of Lightning Lew.

"Oh, glory! sure, it's well ye spoke, me bye. In another minute ye wud have had me knife bechune two of yer ribs."

"I'm glad to see you were so careful, Dan."

"Yis, but how come ye dressed up like an Injine?"

"That fellow over there lent me his clothes."

"Lent ye him, is it?" asked Dan, with a puzzled look.

"Wall, that is, I borrowed 'em without asking him."

"And where is he now?"

"Over thar by the rocks."

"And won't he raise a ruction and give the alarum?"

"I think not," answered Lew, quietly; "but come on, we mustn't waste time."

"Ye muzzled him thin, did ye?" pursued Dan as Lew led the way, the moon having now gone behind a cloud.

"He won't give us any more trouble anyhow," said Lew, in a non-committal tone.

"No, I don't believe he will," muttered Dan after a pause, as he suddenly comprehended the boy scout's meaning.

"Sh! there are other Injines about," whispered Lew, "and they must not hear you. Come, in a short time we shall be safe."

In ten minutes they had left the lava beds, and in an hour they were once more in camp, where the soldiers hailed Lew's return with every demonstration of joy.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### BILL WILLIAMS LEAVES THE COUNTRY.

A MAN had been brought into camp suspected of being a spy, and the soldiers demanded that he be hanged at once.

It was the morning after Lew's escape from the cave in the lava beds, and when he heard of the affair he went to see the man, suspecting him to be Ben Black.

Instead of the captain of the Regulators, however, he found Bill Williams.

"So it is you!" he said. "Where did you leave your captain?"

"I hain't seen him," muttered Williams, "and I don't want ter. Me and Ben Black ain't pardners no more."

"What were you doing hanging about the camp?"

"Wasn't doin' nothin'. Ain't I got a right to go where I like?"

"You were trying to spy out something, so as to tell Black and his Indians."

"No, I wasn't," growled Williams. "Tell yer me and Ben Black has quit company."

"It's a lie, you are here for no good purpose. You are a spy and if I say the word you will be hanged without a trial."

The outlaw's florid face turned suddenly pale and he muttered huskily:

"I ain't done nuthin' to be hung fur. I was on'y tryin' to get away from Ben Black."

"Why?" asked Lew, believing that the scoundrel was trying to invent some lie to account for his appearance about the camp.

"You know why," muttered Williams.

"No, I do not."

"Yes, yer do. Them papers—you know—in the Injun camp."

"You mean that Ben Black is down on you because you tried to get possession of the colonel's title deeds?"

"Yes; he's madder'n sin and swears he'll kill me as soon as he sees me."

"You must have seen him, then, if you know that."

"No, I hain't. Otten told me 'bout it."

"When did you see Otten?" demanded Lew. "Don't lie to me, Bill Williams, or you'll hang as sure as shootin'."

"I seen him early this morning, if yer want ter know," snarled Williams.

"Where did you see him? In the cave in the lava beds?"

"No, I didn't!" was the surly retort. "I haven't been thar. I met him on the road. Him and the Injuns busted the door down after you 'uns got away. Him and Ben Black had a row 'cause of his lettin' you get off."

"Where is Otten now?" asked Lew. "Speak the truth, Bill Williams, if you never spoke it before, for your life depends on your answers."

"I don't know whar he is," said the outlaw. "He didn't tell me whar he was goin', but he didn't go back to the cave."

"Where is Ben Black, then?"

"Dunno 'less he's with the Injuns. Tell yer I hain't seen him, and don't want ter. I come to camp to get out'n his way."

"You were caught sneaking about the camp. Why didn't yer come straight in if yer was lookin' for protection, you miserable liar?"

"I ain't lyin' this time, Lew, so help me!" declared Williams, with great earnestness. "I'm tellin' yer the plumb truth, hope ter die this minute, if I ain't."

"Why didn't yer come straight into camp?"

"Wall, I was a scared, that's why I didn't."

"Scared of what?"

"Scared of you an' the Irishman. I wanted to see if yer was here fust afore I come in and then the sojers nabbed me."

"You have nothing to fear from me, Bill Williams," said Lew, contemptuously. "You ain't wuth wastin' powder on. It's Ben Black, your master, that I want to meet."

"Ben Black ain't no master o' mine," growled Williams. "I got done with him. He wants all the glory and gives me all the work. Say, if yer won't let the sojers string me up I'll tell yer something."

"You know nothing that I don't know myself, Bill Williams," answered Lew, contemptuously.

"Yes, I do. I know the man what murdered the cunnel."

"And so do I. It was Ben Black!" cried Lew, fiercely.

"You're only guessin' at it," said Williams, eagerly scanning Lew's face.

"I am not. Ben Black boasted of it to my sister, Mary."

"Oh, he did!" growled the other. "Well, it's so, 'cause I seen him done it the night arter the sale. He tried to get the old cunnel's papers and killed him."

"That's not all he has done, the scoundrel!" hissed Lew. "I wish that poor Mary had never seen him."

"Say!" said Williams, eagerly, a sudden thought seeming to strike him, "has the coyote been tryin' ter back out of his marryin' Mary?"

"What do you know of that?" cried Lew, seizing Williams by the throat. "Were you there, did you have a hand in that vile scheme? Out with it, you ruffian, or I'll strangle you."

"Hold up, Lew, don't be in a hurry," stammered Williams, seizing Lew's hands and sink-lage."

ing upon his knees. "Yes, I was thar, I was one o' the witnesses."

"And it was a true marriage?" asked Lew, his hand still grasping the outlaw's throat.

"Yes, it was."

"Swear it, Bill Williams! If you lie to me now I'll kill you!"

"So help me, it was a true marriage! The parson come from Yreka. I know him as well as I know you."

"His name?"

"Evans, he's a Welchman. He married 'em straight and gave Ben Black a paper what me and Otten put our names to."

Lew relaxed his grasp on the outlaw's throat, threw him from him and said:

"Bill Williams, you have saved your life by telling me that. I promised you that you won't be strung up this time, but I'll advise yer to leave here and never show yer face in these parts again. I'll let yer off now, because I don't believe you came here to spy out anything, but I don't forget how you tried to rob us of our home, and I'll give you just two days to get away."

"Whar'll I go?" muttered Bill Williams, doggedly.

"I don't care where you go, but don't show your ugly face around here again or I'll put a bullet through you. Now, you get!"

"You bet!" snarled Williams, as he left the tent.

Lew saw him no more, for a relentless fate was upon his track, and the punishment for his many evil deeds was soon to be meted out to him.

An hour or more after he had left the camp, he was hurrying along a pass in the mountains, eager to reach the settlement, collect his belongings, and leave the region forever.

As he passed a mass of boulders on the highest part of the road, he heard the click of a pistol lock, and a look of fear came into his evil face.

He saw no one and heard only that ominous sound, which seemed to tell him that his moments were numbered and that death was at hand.

"Who's there?" he cried, summoning all his bravado to his aid. "Come out and face me like a man, who ever you are?"

At the summons Ben Black came out from behind the rocks, a rifle at his shoulder.

"I've been waiting for you, Bill Williams," he said. "Do you know what we do with traitors in our band?"

"I ain't no traitor," blustered Williams. "Put up that shootin' iron. What are you got agin me?"

"You tried to cheat me out of the colonel's property."

"No, I didn't. I tried to get them papers by strategy when I couldn't get them no other way. You'd ha' had 'em as soon as I got 'em."

"It's a lie!" hissed Black.

"No, it ain't, cap, no, it ain't," said the other hurriedly. "It's the truth."

"Lucky for you it is, then," muttered Black, "for I had made up my mind to shoot you the first time I saw you. Where are you going?"

"Nowheres," muttered Williams, uneasily. "I can't get too near the sojers you know, and Lightning Lew is around."

"Well, I'm bound for the mountain," said Black, carelessly. "It ain't healthy for me to be seen in the settlement. Good-bye, Bill."

"Good-bye, cap."

The outlaw hurried on never stopping to look behind him, but making all speed down the pass.

A few minutes later Ben Black appeared on the highest point of the rocks looking intently toward a certain part of the path, distant a third of a mile.

After a minute or so a figure appeared in the road at this particular point.

There was a puff, a flash, a sharp report, a rush of air and a few seconds later Bill Williams lay dead in the path, a prey to the wolves and vultures of the mountain.

"That's what I do to all who go back on me," muttered Ben Black, as he coolly blew the smoke from the rifle barrel. "No one goes back on me wth safety, I can tell you."

"I am afraid to leave you now, brother," said Mary. "I fear that man and feel that unless am with you I shall be in constant danger."

"Ye need fear nothin', me dear young leddy," said Dan, who was present. "Ben Black knows very well phwat we'll do wid him if he shows his face around here."

"Do not be afraid, sister," said Lew. "I will take you to a place of safety. Dan shall go with us and no danger shall come near you."

"I do not deserve such kindness," sighed Mary, "after what I have done—after I have been so false to you all. When I think of what that villain has made me, I feel as if I ought not to live, that I—"

"Say no more, sister," interposed Lew. "You are not what you fear. You are the lawful wife of Ben Black. You were married by a minister of the church."

"Thank heaven!" cried Mary, "but how do you know that?"

"Williams has told me and I believe him. The minister's name was Evans. Williams and Otten signed the certificate."

"Then at least I may look honest people in the face, although I did wrong to leave my home and go with that scoundrel."

"Yes, and the villain only lied when he said you were not his wife."

"Faix, I don't believe he can tell the truth if he tries," said Dan. "It's not in him, the robber."

"He said that mother deceived his father years ago," said Mary, "and that he was sworn to vengeance when a child."

"He lies!" cried Lew fiercely. "He is of the same age as mother herself. He wanted to marry her and she refused him, knowing him to be a scoundrel. She has told me all. Ben Black is incapable of telling the truth."

"That's phwat I said meself," said Dan, "though not so fine, begob. Faix, ye have a fine gift of talkin', so you have, Lew, me bye."

"Ben Black is as false as Satan," continued Lew. "My mother has told me that she would not marry him and that he swore to have revenge, if he had to wait forty years. She recognized him that night when he came to the house and knew that he was there for no good purpose."

"No, not him, the ugly vilyan," said Dan.

"Knowing him as she did, she would have warned the colonel against him, but the poor misguided man would not listen to reason and the warning was lost."

"More shame to Ben Black for it," said Dan. "It's a fine long list of evil deeds he has to answer for one of those days."

"My mother married James Redmond, one of the early settlers in California and I was their only child. My father was killed by the Indians, and then mother married Colonel Valleo, who adopted me as his own son."

"And a finer one he couldn't have," said Dan, "and it's many a time he repented sinding ye from the house that dark and stormy night. Sure it was me own bad luck that was in it, for if I hadn't been there it wouldn't have happened, be the powers!"

"No, no, Dan, you shan't say that," protested Lew. "You are my friend and have always been so. But for you I would never have left the cave alive."

"Don't forget the kitten cats," laughed Dan. "Troth, but for them, it's meself that couldn't have done the forst thing, so I couldn't."

"Well, then, we won't forget the cat, Dan," said Lew, with a smile. "Don't give up, sister. You still have mother and me, and Dan will be your protector whenever I am not on hand."

"I will that!" cried Dan heartily.

"I cannot realize how I could have been so blind as to love that man," said Mary, thoughtfully. "It was not love; it was madness."

"Say no more, sister," said Lew. "You are free from that scoundrel's clutches, and he shall never harm you again. He is sure to be punished for his misdeeds, for the vengeance of heaven, although sometimes long delayed, is certain to fall at last upon the head of the evildoer."

"Ye never said a truer worrud than that, me bye," coincided Dan, with great earnestness.

Lew, Mary and Dan left the camp that day and proceeded at once to the settlement where the young scout searched out the Reverend Mr. Evans and inquired of him concerning the marriage of Mary Valleo and Ben Black.

The clergyman remembered the circumstances perfectly and recognized Mary in a moment, declaring positively that the marriage was not only legal, but that it was also registered upon the records of the county, and that no one could dispute its validity.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### LEW MAKES DISCOVERIES.

"You must not remain here, sister, there is too much danger," said Lew, after the departure of Williams. "You must return to the settlement or join my mother in Ogalalla's village."

After having settled this matter Lew met Old Vet, the stage driver, who said:

"Glad ter see ye, my boy, I am, by the etarnal, and Mary, too, and you, too, Irish. How's mother, Lew?"

"I left her in Ogalalla's village, but the settlement is quiet now and—"

"I ain't nuthin' but a rough man, I know," said Vet, "but if the mother and this young lady will come to my cabin I reckon that mebby they'll be safer than in the settlement. What do yer say, my boy?"

"That I accept your offer and thank you besides, for I know you to be a friend, and know, too, that I could not leave those I love in better hands."

"No more ye couldn't," said Dan.

"Thankee," said Old Vet, with tears in his eyes, "and, by the etarnal, I'll die afore I goes back on my trust."

Early the next day Mrs. Valleo and Mary took up their abode with Old Vet, and Lew and Dan returned to the front.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### "ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD."

THERE was a crowd around the tavern in the settlement, and all the men seemed greatly excited over something.

A deputy sheriff had just put up a notice upon a sign board in front of the tavern, and the men elbowed each other in their haste to read it.

"What does it say, boys?" asked one old man, putting on a pair of big horn frame spectacles. "Reckon my eyes ain't as good as they used to be and fine printin' bothers me."

"It's a reward fur somebody," replied a younger man. "One thousand dollars, dead or alive."

"Wall, yer don't say? Reckon somebody'll try to get it."

"Here's Old Vet," cried some one. "He kin read it."

The old stage driver approached the group at that moment and the men called to him to read out the notice on the board.

"You've got more schoolin' than the rest of us, Vet," said the old man, "and better eyes, too, I reckon. Read out the paper so's we can tell what it says."

"It's a reward."

"And fur a thousand dollars."

"Who's it fur, Vet?"

"Looks ter me like that coyote—"

"Yer don't say it's that—"

"Stand aside thar, boys, and let Old Vet give it us straight."

The stage driver pushed his way through the crowd, read the notice, and said:

"Wall, that thar is a reward of one thousand dollars for the body of Ben Black, dead or alive, and he is charged with the murder of Cunnel Valleo, and stirrin' up the Injuns to war."

"So it war Ben Black what done it, hey?" muttered a miner. "Wall, I allus thought so m'self."

"Then why in time was you so hot to string up that poor woman fur the night the cunnel was done fur?" demanded Vet.

"Wall, folks do make mistakes sometimes, don't they?" returned the other, doggedly.

"Maybe they do," muttered Vet, "but not sech mistakes as them. If it hadn't been fur Lew and that Irishman, you-uns would ha' made a big un that 'ere night and one what you'd ha' swung fur, by the Etarnal."

"How'd they find out that Ben Black done it?"

"He confessed it to Mary and Bill Williams told Lew that Ben done it and that he seen him."

"Wall, no one ain't goin' to take the word of Bill Williams on it, for he's dead."

"Yas, and that's what Ben Black will be next if he ain't keerful," said some one. "He's a marked man, he is."

"And there's some others what'll have to leave the country putty durned sudden or they might wake up some mornin' find theirselvess swingin' at the end of a rope with nuthin' ter stand onter."

"I reckon Otten is one o' them fellers. Folks knows how he tried ter chisel the cunnel out'n his land and they're hot arter his hide."

"And that ain't all he done nuther," declared Vet. "He jined Ben Black in stirrin' up the Injuns, and he'll be wanted for that, too."

"Law and justice ain't played out in California, you bet," observed the tavern-keeper, "and such fellers as Ben Black 'll find it out."

"Reckon Bill Williams has found it out already."

"Yas, and there's some fellers not fur away by the etarnal, that'll have ter walk pretty straight hereafter," added Vet, "or they'll find it out to their sorrow."

Some of the men cast black looks at the old stage-driver, but Vet was as fearless as he was outspoken, and he said, defiantly:

"You uns needn't look cross-eyed at me, for I mean just what I say. Yas, Josh Harris and Jim Badger, I mean you and more of you besides. Yer hain't done enough ter get yanked up to the limb of a tree, yer hain't, but yer want ter go slow all the same, and that's what I'm a-tellin' yer."

With this warning Old Vet strode away, cracking his whip, and the crowd about the tavern gradually dispersed.

A few minutes later, a man in rough clothes, a full, red beard and a slouched hat on his head halted in front of the notice board, looked suspiciously around and muttered to himself:

"There don't no one seem ter know me, but I ain't riskin' that old feller's eyes. He'd spy out anything, the old fool, cuss him! Hallo, what's this yer? Somethin' interestin', I reckon, by the way the fellers looked at it."

He read the notice of a reward, coughed nervously, looked all around, and then strolled into the tavern.

In a few minutes he came out, went to the general store, a few rods distant, made a few purchases, and then took the road to the hills.

"Ahem! A reward of a thousand dollars, dead or alive, for Ben Black," he mused, when he was clear of the settlement. "That's news, but I reckon it'll keep fur a bit. Reckon it's lucky nobody knowed me, or I moughtn't be able to tell Ben about it. Cliff Otten ain't got many more friends than Ben Black has, but I ain't goin' to risk nuthin' comin' down here again. Fust thing I know, they'll be a notice up for me, dead or alive, and afore that time I think I'd better skip."

It was fortunate for Otten that Vet had not seen him, for although there was no reward offered for him the settlers would not have dealt gently with him if the old stage-driver had given the alarm.

"I'll see what he says," mused the man as he went on, "and if he wants to do the square thing I'll tell him about this and put him on his guard, but if he won't then I'm off and he can look out for himself. This part of the country is gettin' a little too hot for me, and mebby the quicker I get out of it the better."

The revolt of the Indians, although not yet crushed, was seen to be a hopeless affair and Otten knew that in time it would be put down and that the whites who had taken part in the war against the settlers would share the same fate as the savages.

He had learned much on his visit to the settlement, and being a man of considerable judgment had guessed at more, all of which had brought him to the conclusion that the farther away from his old home he could take himself, the safer he would be.

With this idea in his mind, after having purchased a few things he most needed, he lost no time in getting to the hills where he knew he would find Ben Black, with whom he had business of importance.

"If he's inclined to be square," he muttered again, as he passed out of sight of the settlement, "all right, but if he ain't, then it's his lookout what becomes of him and not mine."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### OLD VET TELLS A STORY.

THE sun was nearing the western horizon when Mrs. Valleo, coming out of the cabin of Old Vet, glanced anxiously down the road, pressed her hands to her head and mused:

"What can have detained him and why does he go so often to the settlement? Yesterday he was there and again to-day and every moment he is absent I feel a nameless dread that I cannot explain. Can there be any danger lurking over Lew? Am I in peril myself? Oh, this suspense is killing me."

She sat down on a low bench outside the door, and presently Mary came from the house and said:

"What is the matter, mother? You look sad—anxious."

"No, no, it is nothing, child," said the poor woman. "I am weary, that is all. Go on with your work, dear, that our host may find everything in order when he returns."

"Yes, mother," and Mary went into the house and set to work getting supper.

Her mother had told her nothing about the reward offered for Ben Black, which Vet had

told her of the day before, for it could do no good to do so, and might only call up sad memories.

She knew nothing of it, therefore, and despite the trials she had been through, she could now go about doing the simple duties which devolved upon her, with a light heart and a cheerful face, although she no longer sang at her work as before.

While Mary was busy indoors, Mrs. Valleo fell into a reverie, sitting on the stool outside, and when the veteran stage driver appeared she did not see him.

"Thar she is," muttered Old Vet, coming up the path, "a lookin' as purty as a picter, for all the hard things she's been through. Reckon it's a good time to tell her now, good as any I'll get."

He kicked the pebbles in his path as he came on and coughed, at which Mrs. Valleo suddenly looked up, saw him and smiled.

"Ah, it is you, kind friend," she said. "I'm glad you have returned."

"Ain't been lonesome, have yer?" asked Vet. "Didn't mean ter stay away so long, but I reckoned there was news to the settlement and thought mebby you'd like to hear it. They say Lew has offered to take the sojers plumb into the very stronghold of the Injuns, and if he does, the fight's about over."

"How I wish that it were!" sighed Mrs. Valleo. "Not a night passes that I do not think of my boy and imagine that he is in some danger from which there is no escape."

"You needn't ter fear fur young Lew, missus," said Vet, encouragingly. "The boy's all right. He's got Dan with him, and there ain't a faithfuller feller than that thar Irishman. He'd go through fire and water to save Lew, he would."

"Yes, I know it, he is a faithful fellow, and as brave as he is faithful."

"Can I set down?" asked Vet, bringing a three legged stool from the corner of the house. "I'd like to tell you suthin', and now seems as good a time as any."

"Certainly," said the other. "You have no need to ask that, one who has been so kind to me as you have."

"Thankee," muttered Vet, as he seated himself. "I hain't done much, ma'm, and 'pears ter me I might ha' done more."

"No, no, you have done everything, and but for you I would have been friendless."

"You don't mind my tellin' you a story, do yer?" asked Vet, suddenly. "It mought be interestin'."

"Then it will interest me, I know. Tell it, by all means."

"Wall, close on ter twenty year ago there was two brothers what started to cross the prairies from St. Louis, to seek their fortunes in California, like lots others at that time."

"Yes," said the listener.

"There was a young woman in the party, the pride of the train she was, and both the brothers fell in love with her, and one fine night all hands was surprised by an invite to a weddin', the younger brother and the lady bein' the parties most interested."

Mrs. Valleo nodded, and Vet continued.

"Yes, they was married, and everybody wished 'em joy, and none of 'em more than the other brother, who wasn't a bit jealous to think the gal hadn't took him, 'stead o' the other one."

"Wall, they left the train arter they got across the plains, and settled down in a pretty little valley, whar fortun' seemed ter smile on 'em from the fust."

"Afore a year was up a little baby boy come to 'em, and he was the pride and joy of their lives, he was, and they both loved him all they could, and thought him the best baby, even there was, and was so happy that you couldn't ha' thought any trouble could ever come to 'em."

The listener sighed and Old Vet, clearing his throat, went on:

"Yes'm, he was the light o' their lives, he was, and there didn't seem ter be nary a cloud on their sky, but they was comin', and at last the storm broke and everything was black and gloomy."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Mrs. Valleo.

"The Injuns began their dreadful work of destruction. One night when the young husband and wife was sittin' at their supper, without a word o' warnin' the savages broke in upon 'em."

"The poor mother, pressing her baby to her breast, rushed from the house, fled to the settlement and gave the alarm, the neighbors returnin' just in time to find the house in ruins and

the poor man about to be burned at the stake."

"But he was rescued?" cried Mrs. Valleo eagerly.

"Yes, he was rescued. His brother came with the settlers and saved him."

"Yes, yes, and then?" cried Mrs. Valleo, eagerly.

"The young husband joined the government scouts, and did good work, until one day a treacherous Injin guide murdered him. His body was found by his brother, who swore to avenge his death."

"The poor woman disappeared and no one knew where she was, but I determined to find her and care for her and her child, as well as to avenge the death of the man she loved."

"You?" cried Mrs. Valleo.

"Yes. Years passed and at last I found her, but she didn't need my help, for she was the wife of an honest and loving man, and her son was—"

"Say no more!" cried Mrs. Valleo. "It is my own story you have told. You are John Redmond, my husband's brother."

"I am," said the veteran.

"Why did you not tell me this before?"

"Because then it would only bring back sad thoughts, and you was so happy I couldn't do it."

"That is why you tried to save the old home when it was in danger of being sold?"

"Yes."

"You can help me still more then," said Mrs. Valleo. "Lew gave into my keeping the title deeds of the old place, given to him by the colonel, but I fear that something may happen to me and I want you to keep them. They will be safer with you."

She took a package of papers from the bosom of her dress and handed them to Vet who glanced at them and thrust them into his pocket.

At that moment, the sun being nearly down, a shadow suddenly fell across the path, and looking up Vet saw Ben Black and Otten standing before him.

Mrs. Valleo uttered a cry of dismay and would have fled into the house, but Black restrained her by a quick motion, saying at the same time:

"Stop where you are. I have something to say which concerns you both."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### BEN BLACK'S TRIUMPH.

"WHAT do yer want, Ben Black?" demanded Vet, while Mrs. Valleo cast an anxious look at the house. "It ain't no good, I can tell yer."

"You know well enough what we want," muttered Otten. "You are accused of robbing the mail coach, and we intend to search yer and prove it."

"Robbin' the mail coach!" cried Vet. "Why, coyotes and rattlesnakes, if that ain't the biggest lie I ever heard! Search me, hey? Wall, I reckon not. No such skunks as you and Ben Black are again' to search me, not if I know it."

"Come, come, a truce to this," said Black, bluntly. "You have certain papers in your possession and I want them. There's no use in mincing matters. I saw Mrs. Valleo give you those papers and I want them."

"I'll die fust!" cried Vet.

"As you like!" hissed Black. "Otten, put the old woman inside and lock the door. We'll see if the old fool won't do as I ask him."

Otten forced the poor woman into the house, and then put the key on the outside of the door and locked it.

Mrs. Valleo glanced hurriedly around, and, seeing no trace of Mary, breathed a sigh of relief.

"She has escaped, thank Heaven," she murmured, espousing an open window in the rear, "and she is free from that villain's clutches. Pray Heaven she may bring help for I fear we may need it now if ever we did."

"Now then, you meddlesome old fool," hissed Black, drawing a pistol, "give me the papers."

"Never," said Vet. "They were intrusted to my keeping, and, by the Eternal I won't give them to any one but the owner."

"Curse you," roared Black, "do you want me to add another crime to my list and stain my hands with your worthless blood? Give me the papers, or by Heaven I'll kill you."

"Never!" cried Vet.

"Now then, upon him, Otten," cried Black, and in a moment the two scoundrels had flung

themselves on the old man and forced him to the ground."

Otten seized him by the throat, and Black, holding a pistol to his throat, thrust his hand into the inner pocket of the old man's rough coat and drew forth a packet of papers.

"At last!" he cried triumphantly, as he hurriedly glanced over them, "mine, mine, at last."

He thrust the papers into his pocket, and said:

"Let him up, Otten. The old fool can't hurt us, and I don't want to kill him."

"Yer cowardly coyote," muttered Vet, as he arose to his feet, "it took two of yer to do it, but never you mind, Ben Black, there'll come a day of reckonin' for you some day and then you'll remember what I tell yer now. The mark of death is on yer and you're a doomed man, just as sure as I stand here."

"Silence!" roared Black. "Open the door, Otten, and put the old fool inside. I've got the papers and that's enough."

Otten opened the door, pointed his pistol at Vet and said:

"Go in there and don't talk so much. Come, move quick, or I'll have to make you."

"You'll both be on yer move quicker'n yer ever done afore many days," muttered Vet as he went in. "Mark what I say, Ben Black. If the bullet ain't cast what's to end yer evil life, I'm very much mistaken. Yer time is short, Ben Black, and—"

With a cry of rage the outlaw dashed against the door, slammed it into place, turned the key and hurried away as the sun sank from sight in the west.

"I reckon it's time you settled with me, ain't it, Ben?" asked Otten, when they were well away from the place.

"What do you mean?" hissed Black.

"You promised me five thousand dollars for going in with yer on that note business."

"Well, I can't pay you now," was the surly answer.

"Yes, you can, and you must," said Otten bluntly.

"Must?" hissed Black.

"Yes, must. You've got the money; and I want it."

"I tell you I'll give it to you, but not to-day," returned Black impatiently. "Can't you wait?"

"I've been waiting," was the reply. "Well, if you don't settle up, I know where I can raise a thousand dollars, anyhow."

"What do you mean?" muttered Black.

"By giving information as to your whereabouts. Maybe you don't know there's a reward of a thousand dollars offered for you, dead or alive."

"When did you learn this?" hissed Black, the color mounting to his face.

"Two days ago."

"And you said nothing?"

"No."

"And now you mean to betray me to the soldiers, do you?" demanded Black angrily.

"That's about the size of it," said Otten coolly, "that is, unless you make up your mind to settle up with me without any—"

Black interrupted him with an oath and a hoarse cry of rage, as he suddenly sprang upon him, a long knife in his hand.

"No, you don't!" hissed Otten, throwing up his hand in which there gleamed a pistol. "Two can play at that game, Mr. Ben Black."

"Curse you!" growled Black, slowly retreating as the muzzle of the pistol was raised to the level of his eyes.

"I've had enough of you, Ben Black," said Otten, "and if I get a chance I'm going to turn over a new leaf. I'm tired of living on the misery of others. I want to be able to sleep sound of a night and not start at every noise and think my life's in danger."

"Oh, you do, eh?" laughed Black, scornfully. "So you mean to reform, do you? And you were going to begin it by informing on me to the soldiers and getting the reward? Bah! you don't intend to reform any more than I do."

"Well, give me what you said you would and let me go," growled Otten. "I want to skip the country. Nobody wants me here and it ain't safe fer me ter stay."

"No!" said Black. "You tried to bluff me and now you get nothing. If you had stood by me you would have got something, but now—"

"That's a lie, Ben Black," hissed Otten. "Yer never intended to pay me. You just wanted to make me yer fool. You never told the truth in yer life. Yer lied about Mrs. Valleo, yer lied to Mary, you are a lie yourself and the truth isn't in you."

Black darted an angry look at the man who dared to speak these unwelcome truths, and his fingers twitched as he held his knife in his hand, ready to spring upon the other at the first opportunity.

Otten slowly retreated, his weapon still leveled at Black's head.

"I've done with you, Ben Black," he said. "Good-night."

In an instant he had plunged into the thicket and was gone.

Ben Black put his fingers to his lips and blew a peculiar whistle which could be heard to a great distance.

In a few moments an Indian glided out into the path and said:

"My brother called me?"

"Yes," hissed Black. "Otten is a traitor, follow on his trail, his scalp is yours if you take it. Remember, let him not escape, and I will give you rich presents."

"Ugh!" grunted the savage, as he bent his face to the ground and then set off in the direction taken by Otten.

"Warecloud will soon settle him," muttered Black, "and one more traitor is disposed of. One by one my friends desert me, and a price is set upon my life, but still I will not flinch, and if die I must, it will be with colors flying, game to the last."

He listened for several minutes, and then hearing nothing, muttered:

"But one path is open to me. I must make a bold stand, and fortune is within my grasp. I must sell these papers at once for as large a sum as possible to men who will take them on speculation, and then leave the country forever. I have played a desperate game, and the odds have been against me, but I have not yet lost all, and Ben Black is worth a dozen dead men yet."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE FATE OF THE OLD CHIEF.

WHEN Mary fled from the cabin of old Vet to escape the hateful clutches of Ben Black, it was her intention to make her way to the settlement and remain there until Lew returned.

She did not fear for her mother, knowing that Black could no longer harm her, and trusting in the veteran stage driver's ability to protect her from insult.

She could not endure to even think of the wretch who had proved so false to her, however, could not bear to hear his voice or even look at him, and when she realized that he was at hand she made her escape through the window and hurried towards the settlement.

In her haste, however, she lost her way, and presently found herself wandering about the mountains with no definite idea as to where she was going.

The sun went down, darkness came on, she lost the path and soon realized that she could neither retrace her steps to the cabin nor find the settlement.

After trying for some time to set herself right, she had found the path again and was about to proceed in what she considered the way to the settlement, when she suddenly heard voices.

They were those of Ben Black and Otten, and the men were coming her way.

In an instant she fled in the opposite direction, making all haste to put as wide a space as possible between herself and Ben Black.

She did not pause until she was ready to faint with exhaustion, leaning against a tree by the side of the path while she panted for breath.

The moon presently arose, and she was about to proceed, when she heard a light footstep in front of her and shrank back in terror.

"Do not fear me, white maiden," said a pleasant voice. "I am Fawn, the daughter of the great chief Ogalalla, the friend of the pale faces."

"Ah, yes, I remember, it was at your village where my mother stopped when our house was burned down. I know you to be good and kind and I do not fear you. I am escaping from the villain Ben Black, and when I heard your step, I thought it was he."

"You are the sister of the brave young white chief, Lightning Lew. He saved the Fawn's life, and she will never forget."

"Yes, he is my brother. You have seen him, you will take me to him?"

"I will take you to the village, no harm shall come to you," said the Indian girl. "Ben Black bad man, he will not come to Ogalalla; you will be safe."

"You are good and kind, Fawn, and I will

go with you. Come, let us hasten. I would not have Ben Black see me for the world."

"Ben Black has a cruel heart and a false tongue—his words are lies! Many of our braves follow him on the warpath, and now the fire on the hearth will no more burn for them. Ben Black told them lies; he said they would drive out the pale-face, and now the women weep for them in the empty wigwam. Let not Ben Black come to Ogallala's camp, for my father is angry at him for taking away his young men. Come, let us go."

The Indian girl now led the way, and in about an hour the camp was reached and Mary found a shelter at last.

Toward morning she was awakened by some unusual stir in the village, and creeping to the opening of her tent she looked out:

"Do not make noise," said the voice of Fawn at her side. "Bad man come to village, bad pale-face, bad Indian. Fawn has fear for pale-face maiden."

"Bad white men have come to the village?" repeated Mary. "Who are they, do you know?"

At this moment a camp fire near the tent suddenly blazed up brightly, and by its fierce light Mary saw the man she most hated and feared come out into the open space surrounded by the tents.

With him were a dozen or more savages and two or three white men, all inflamed with drink and evil passions, and all ready to do the slightest bidding of the outlaw who led them.

The old chief now came out of his tent and advancing slowly and with great dignity towards the group said, angrily:

"Why has Ben Black the outlaw and renegade come to the village of Ogallala? What do you seek here, evil man? This is no place for you, you who have lied to my young men, you whose hand is stained with the blood of the old and feeble, you whose name is a reproach."

"Words are idle, old man," muttered Black. "I came here because I choose. Men do not question my acts unpunished. Go to your tent, you gibbering old woman, and leave my affairs to him who best knows how to manage them."

The hot blood rushed to the temples of the old warrior as he heard these insulting words, and, raising his hand, he advanced a pace and said:

"Go! black-hearted renegade, go, traitor to your own race, you are not fit to dwell with dogs. Ogallala is a great chief and he does not harbor traitors!"

"Ogallala is an old squaw!" sneered Black. "Wareloud is chief of the tribe. He is a great chief, he does not fear to lead the young men to battle, he does not talk, he acts. Warriors, behold Wareloud, your chief. Do not listen to the words of this foolish old woman."

Wareloud had been promised the leadership of the tribe by Ben Black and the man's vanity had been fed at every opportunity till now he felt himself to be the greatest warrior in the land.

The soldiers had succeeded in driving many of the savages from their hiding-places and these, under the name of Ben Black, had now returned to the village.

Many of those who had joined the rebels were there besides others, greatly outnumbering those who had remained true to the whites.

At a signal from Ben Black two score warriors now joined him and he cried aloud:

"Behold your chief, Wareloud!"

"Wareloud, great chief!" they all shouted.

Ogallala threw aside his blanket, seized a knife from a belt of a man near him and cried:

"Wareloud is a dog, a wolf, a false hearted traitor. Ogallala spits upon him and upon Ben Black, the lying-tongued, red-handed viper."

"Curse you!" hissed Black, drawing a revolver, "we will see whose voice carries most authority with it. Take that, you chattering old idiot!"

There was a flash, a report, a single cry of pain, and the old chief fell upon his face dead, shot through the heart by the renegade, murdered at his own hearthstone.

The Indian girl uttered a wild cry and dashed out of the tent while Mary, overcome with the horror of the scene, fell to the ground insensible.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### PREPARING FOR FLIGHT—ON THE ALERT.

BEN BLACK was in possession of the Indian village, and his word was law.

Wareloud was the nominal chief, but Black

moved him as a man moves puppets, and the savage was merely a tool in the hands of the renegade.

Mary's presence in the camp had been soon discovered by Black, and the poor girl was now a prisoner with no hope of escape.

"You cannot get away from me, you see," laughed the monster, "and before long I shall have your precious brother in my power as well. I have not schemed in vain, Mistress Black."

"I am not your wife?" cried Mary, with the fiercest scorn and indignation. "I renounce you and forget that I was ever so mad as to believe you. Your whole life is a lie, Ben Black, but as sure as there is a God above us he will not suffer you to go unpunished."

"Ha—ha, that sounds very nice," laughed the arch scoundrel, "but I don't feel a bit afraid. I have a way of succeeding in matters that I take hold of and I shall win in this game as in all the rest."

The man then went away and presently called a council of the braves to determine upon some plan of action.

It was Ben Black's intention to desert the men he had led and to make his escape from the country, but at the same time he must appear to be heart and soul with them, and to be looking after their interests alone.

He cared nothing for them now, and saw that he would only lose by remaining with them and so, selfish to the last, he thought only of his own safety and meant to lose no time in getting away.

Although he knew it not, his time was short and he would need to hasten indeed if he would avoid the retribution that was rapidly drawing near.

Old Vet, hurrying to the settlement after leaving Mrs. Valleo in a place of safety, had given the alarm, and there were many who were eager to claim the reward offered for Ben Black, dead or alive.

Otten had escaped the fate intended for him by Black, and he too was among the number of his enemies and one not to be despised.

Fawn the Indian girl had not been seen since the murder of the old chief, but if Black had known her better he would have known that she would avenge her father's death even at the cost of her own life, and that, go where he would, she would be ever on his track.

There was need of haste indeed, for Lightning Lew had sworn to kill the man upon sight, and he would keep his word so sure as he met his father's murderer.

The Indians had been driven from their fastnesses, many had been killed and many taken captive, and Lew was now returning to the settlement with Dan.

He was still at some little distance from it, there being yet a few hours of daylight when he met Otten.

The boy was about to draw his pistol when the man threw up his hand and cried:

"Don't shoot, Lew, don't shoot! I know I ain't done right, but I'm goin' to do better if I can. I've got news for you."

"Well, what is it?"

"Ben Black and his Injuns have seized Ogallala's camp, the old chief is dead, and your sister Mary has been taken again."

"Mary again a prisoner in the hands of Ben Black!" muttered Lew. "Heaven save her!"

"Yes, and there's worse news. Ben Black has got the papers you left with Old Vet. He means to leave the country, and he's only staying with the Injuns till he gets away safely."

"You have fallen out with him?" asked Lew.

"Yes. He put an Injun on my track and told him not to let me get away alive; but I had a gun and the Injun didn't, and the odds were too many for him. After that I heard what had happened, and I thought I'd better make tracks."

"Faix, I've often heard it said," remarked Dan, "that when rogues got to quarrellin' that wot the time when honest men got their rights, and faix, I believe it now."

"Come," cried Lew, "there is no time to be lost. We must hurry on to the Indian village. Mr. Otten, if you really wish to help me, hasten to the fort and bring a detachment of soldiers. I must go on at once. Come, Dan, if you are going with me."

"I'll do it," cried Otten.

"Faix, I'm wid yer," said Dan. "It'll never do to let you go off alone among all them injunes."

Lew left the road and struck off across country at once, the path being as plain to him as though it had been a high road.

Night fell before he reached the village of Ogallala but the darkness was in his favor, as he was able to reconnoiter the camp without being discovered.

He did not see Mary or Ben Black and he feared that the villain had escaped.

"I must get into the camp somehow," he said, upon returning to where he had left Dan.

"I can learn nothing out here."

"Why don't ye walk boldly in thin and ax 'em is yer sisther there?" replied Dan.

"That wouldn't work, Dan," laughed Lew.

"I should be sure to—Sh!"

Lew dropped to the ground pulling Dan after him.

Then he heard a grunt and the outline of a savage was suddenly seen within a few feet of them.

With the swiftness of thought Lew suddenly sprang up, leaped upon the Indian and bore him to the ground.

"Not a word or you are a dead man!" he hissed, clapping his hand over the fellow's mouth and pressing the pistol to his head.

Dan was at his side in an instant, and the man was first disarmed and gagged, and then stripped of his clothes, which Lew put on.

The young scout then darkened his face and hands by rubbing moistened earth upon them, put on the Indian's feathered head dress, and looked like a perfect savage.

The Indian was bound, gagged and hidden away in the bush where he could not possibly be seen or be able to give an alarm, and then Lew boldly entered the village, Dan remaining on the outside.

Some of the savages spoke to the boy scout, but he answered only with a grunt, and passed on.

In the center of the space before the tents a stake had been driven into the ground, and on three sides of it were piled heaps of brushwood, all ready for the torch.

Lew shuddered when he saw these preparations, and wondered for whom they had been made.

He looked for Black, and, not seeing him, stretched himself out before a fire not far from the stake, and pretended to go to sleep.

He waited for an hour, during which time he saw two horses brought out and made ready for a journey, being then tethered to a tree near the edge of the village.

At last an Indian came hurriedly into the camp, stopped before one of the tepees, and spoke a few words in an excited tone.

Ben Black came from the tent in an instant, muttering to himself:

"So soon? That fellow Otten must have given the alarm after all. Curse that blundering Indian for not killing him!"

The man looked around him, listened for a moment, and then calling the Indian to his side, said:

"Bring out the prisoner, and be quick about it!"

The savage went away, and presently returned, bringing Mary with him, her arms bound behind her back.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### A JUST RETRIBUTION.

"Do you still persist in your refusal to go with me?" asked Black, as Mary was brought forward.

"Yes!" cried the brave girl. "Rather death than that."

"Then be it death!" hissed Black. "To the stake with her!"

Several Indians sprang to their feet and Mary was led to the stake.

Lew arose with the others and remained close at hand while Mary was being bound to the stake.

"Now the fire!" shouted the renegade.

"No!" cried Lew, bounding forward, felling two or three of the savages and cutting the cords that bound Mary by a few rapid strokes of his knife.

"Stand aside, Indian!" hissed Black.

"No!" cried Lew again.

Black shuddered, turned pale for an instant, and then hissed:

"Who are you?"

"Lightning Lew!" cried the boy scout.

"Now then, Ben Black, it is a life for a life!"

The outlaw drew his knife as Lew leaped upon him and then began the fiercest combat the savages had ever witnessed.

It was seen from the start that it could end only with the death of one or both of the fighters, but no one attempted to interfere in the slightest.

The firelight shone upon the two combatants, now flashing from their gleaming knives, now shining upon their faces, Lew's set and determined, Ben Black's haggard and desperate.

The blades rang against each other as thrust after thrust was parried or turned aside and for a long time neither seemed to have the advantage.

Lew fought with a calm determination while Black was desperate, so that, despite the latter's greater weight and strength he was no more than an even match for his younger opponent.

Lew's wrist was like fine steel, his eye never lost its fire and his foot was as firm as the ground it rested upon.

Back and forth, around and around the contestants circled, both watching for the slightest advantage, both on the alert to strike the blow which would end the fight.

The Indians sat or stood around, watching the fight with the keenest interest, yet doing nothing that could give either of the duelists the least advantage.

There was scarcely a man there but hated Ben Black, and would have been glad to see him killed, but the young scout had given the wretch a chance for his life and they would not interfere.

Black presently saw that if the fight continued he must inevitably perish, for Lew was as determined as a bloodhound and had right on his side, but there might be some mishap and so the villain fought on for his life, watching for any chance, no matter how slight, which would throw the balance upon his side.

At last, after ten minutes of the most determined fighting, Black's knife suddenly broke in half and fell to the ground.

In an instant, before Lew could dart forward, a lithe form sprang between him and the outlaw, there was a gleam of light like a flash from a musket and Ben Black fell to the ground pierced to the heart.

Above him stood Fawn, the Indian girl, holding a flashing knife in her hand.

"Life for life!" she cried. "The pale-face killed my father, he is mine. Lightning Lew is brave; he fights like a warrior, but this man's life belonged to me."

Ben Black was dead, and, after all, his blood was not upon Lew's hand.

His evil life had been brought to a sudden and awful end, but his fate was deserved, and no one mourned for him.

The Indians, now that Black was dead, suddenly bethought themselves that Lew was one of their most determined foes, and that more than one of them had sworn to have his scalp.

With a simultaneous yell, a score of painted savages arose to their feet and rushed upon him.

At that moment there was a yell and then a cheer as Dan, Otten, old Vet and a score of brave soldier lads suddenly rushed into the opening.

"Down wid the red devils!" shouted Dan. "Don't give them any quarther! Hooroo for ould Ireland!"

There was a volley, and then the soldiers closed in upon the foe, and a hand-to-hand fight began.

Those who could sought safety in flight, the rest perished, and in a few moments the fight was over.

It was then discovered that Otten had been killed by a blow from a tomahawk, so that although he died in the defense of his own people, his evil deeds had at last found him out and the justice of heaven was satisfied.

The Indians were driven from that part of the country, and the uprising was at an end, the malcontents having gained nothing.

Lew returned to the settlement with Mary, Dan and Vet, and after having been through many troubles and trials began now to reap his reward.

The title deeds were recovered from the body of the dead outlaw, and by them Colonel Valleo's claim to the land he had occupied was fully established.

The farm increased greatly in value as time went on, a new and substantial dwelling was erected upon the site of the old cabin, and where once was the little settlement there is now a prosperous town.

Dan Rafferty remained in California, married and settled down, and to-day he is one of the bonanza kings of the West, but through it all he still remains the firm friend of Lightning Lew.

Mrs. Valleo and Old Vet lived until within a few years ago and died beloved and respected by all who knew them, Mrs. Valleo's property being left jointly to Mary and Lew.

Mary in time forgot the sad experiences through which she had been, and finally married a man who loved her devotedly and whom she could love in return, so that in time the terrible incidents of those few months became but a memory.

Lewis Redmond is now one of the wealthiest and most popular men in California, happily married, prosperous in business and as true to a friend as in the old days when he was known as the Boy Scout.

[THE END.]

N. S. Wood, the author of this story, is also the author of the following stories published in the 5 CENT WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY: No. 1039, "Sport, the New York Bootblack." No. 970, "The Property Boy; or, Before the Footlights and Behind the Scenes." No. 941, "Alone in New York; or, Ragged Rob the Newsboy." No. 913, "Out in the Streets." No. 888, "The Boy Star; or, From the Footlights to Fortune."

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